

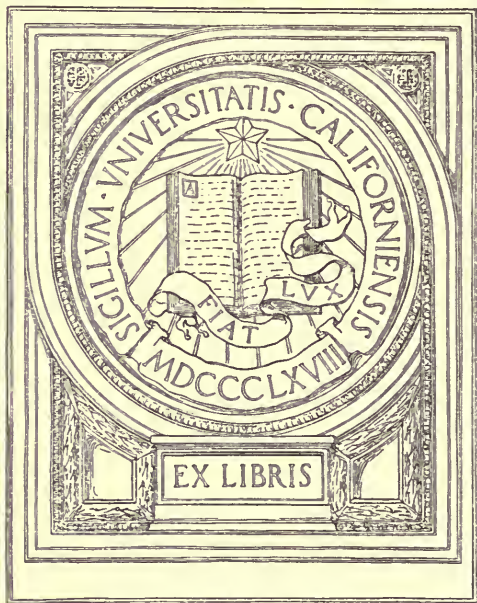
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BY

SUSAN L. VALERGA

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ESPERANZA



BY

SUSAN L. VALERGA

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GOWAN LIBRARY, 1935

INTRODUCTION.

Dear Friends:

In offering this novel for your kind consideration, my sincere wish is, that it may serve as a pastime, for the ever-fleeting hour. If so, I shall feel thoroughly recompensed for having introduced "Esperanza"—signifying Hope. Trusting that my earnest endeavor, of Esperanza's thrilling romance amidst the Sierras may not fail to interest the critical public,

Yours interrogatory,

SUSAN L. VALERGA.

Esperanza

CHAPTER I.

LUCETTE'S CONFESSION

The spacious living room of the Fielding home held an occupant in the person of Adele Thorn the handsome dark-eyed governess of Mr. Fielding's ward, Lucette Westly.

The morning being extremely warm, Adele, seated in a comfortable easy chair, had fallen asleep. The book she had been reading fell from her listless hand, awakening her just as Mr. Fielding, attired in a light gray serge suit, entered the room. Removing his broad panama, he uncovered a wealth of silver gray hair, which set off his ruddy good-natured face.

"What an extremely sultry morning," he remarked, removing his gloves. Suddenly perceiving Adele, who quickly arose, he said, bowing: "Pardon me, Miss Thorn, for having disturbed you."

"Really, I am indebted to you, Mr.

Fielding for having done so," she said, looking at her watch. "I have several duties which require my attention. With your kind permission I beg leave to retire." Adele turning to go, Mr. Fielding graciously asked: "Will you be kind enough to inform Lucette that I wish to speak to her?"

"Certainly, sir; I will deliver your message directly," Adele replied with a slight bow, as she turned to go.

"Strange," said Mr. Fielding, seating himself, "how nervous Adele always appears to be when in my presence."

"Ha! ha!" he joyfully exclaimed, as he heard a peal of light-hearted laughter outside. "Here comes my little truant now. How her merry laughter thrills my heart." Rising, he greeted Lucette who, smiling, bounded into the room. Her soft radiant beauty was electrified by her girlish expression. Her lovely clear brow was surrounded by a mass of golden curls, the tinge of which enhanced the glory of her beautiful azure eyes. Her form was round, dainty and supple. Carelessly removing her large garden hat she tossed it aside, as she ran to Mr. Fielding to receive his morning kiss. She then sat down on the footstool at his feet.

"Well, Lucette," said he, stroking her curls. "My, but you're fresh and rosy! Where were you so early?"

"In the garden. I was waiting for Leigh to pluck me some roses, when Adele delivered your message, so off I ran without them." And looking sweetly up into Mr. Fielding's face she laughingly continued: "So here I am."

"I'm very much afraid that Leigh will bestow the roses upon your governess, Adele."

Lucette quickly replied: "Leigh and Adele are not friends, so my bouquet will be perfectly safe."

"Not friends?" questioned Mr. Fielding in a surprised tone. "Why?"

"I'll tell you. Listen. Yesterday morning Adele inquired of Leigh if there had been any mail received from Lieutenant Fielding. Leigh answered slowly, 'None.' Adele then turning to me laughingly said, 'What a pity, Lucette, the lieutenant must surely have forgotten you.' Leigh, with a slight sneer, answered Adele, saying, 'What a pity it is that some folks forget to mind their own affairs.' Adele cast an indignant look at Leigh.

shrugged her shoulders, and then walked hastily away."

"And then," inquired Mr. Fielding.

"I asked Leigh for what reason he spoke in such an abrupt manner to Adele."

"Thoughtful little heart," murmured Mr. Fielding, aside.

"Leigh looked at me," steadily continued Lucette, "then asked me the following question: 'Have you ever felt an aversion toward a person which you could not account for?' A thought flashed through my mind and I quickly answered, 'Yes.' Leigh then coolly remarked, 'Miss Lucette, take my advice. Don't place too much confidence in Adele Thorn.'"

"Indeed," said Mr. Fielding, elevating his brow. "I begged Leigh to be more explicit, but further discourse was interrupted by a visitor."

"I must certainly inquire into this affair," thought Mr. Fielding to himself.

"Tell me, Lucette, for whom have you felt an aversion?" asked Mr. Fielding, stroking Lucette's golden curls. Lucette, casting down her full blue eyes, hesitatingly replied: "I would rather not say—because—"

"Because," interrupted Mr. Fielding, impatiently. "Because—what? Speak, child."

Lucette solemnly looking up, tremblingly replied: "Because—he is one—"

"Oh! this suspense," interrupted Mr. Fielding, clasping his hands together. "One—speak, Lucette." Lucette looked at him amazed then eagerly replied: "Dear me! You look so worried, sir, but if I *must* speak, I'm sorry to acknowledge that it is one of Lieutenant Fielding's friends."

"Ah!" returned Mr. Fielding, as he gave a sigh of relief, "I'm heartily glad it is not my son."

"No, indeed," continued Lucette forcibly. "It is his college chum, Roderick De Monte."

"Too bad, Lucette, De Monte impresses you that way, but I am overjoyed that you think favorably of my boy, selfish as it may seem," said he, rising, and clearing his throat.

"Think favorably of Lieutenant Fielding?" emphasized Lucette. "Why not? He is true, noble and to me, a very dear friend." A tear seemed to dim her beautiful azure eyes.

"Lucette," said Mr. Fielding softly, clasping her hand and looking earnestly into her face. "Child, my cherished hope lies in the

fond expectation that some day you may become a nearer—a dearer—friend to my boy. In fact—his wife.”

Lucette with a burning blush mantling her cheek tremblingly replied: “The lieutenant and I have not met one another for at least a year; probably he may have forgotten me.” Choking back a sob that seemed to rise in her throat, she huskily said: “Adele quotes, ‘Out of sight, out of mind’; but,” she continued, with a deep sigh, “I can *never* forget him.”

“Lay no significance whatsoever upon *that* which Adele may quote, only in regard to your lessons. Rest assured,” continued Mr. Fielding, kissing Lucette lightly upon her forehead, “Bert will not be likely to forget an angel, such as *you* are. Depend upon it, Lucette.”

CHAPTER II.

UNEXPECTED NEWS

The door suddenly opened, and on the threshold there stood the privileged little colored domestic, Jute, scrutinizing two letters, which she closely held in her chubby little black hand. Slowly advancing toward the table, she placed them in front of Mr. Fielding, saying: "Dar am yo' letters, massa." Then, perceiving Lucette, she puckered up her thick red lips and in a perplexed tone asked Lucette the reason "dey were gwyne to put dat new filter on de fauc't fo'."

Lucette laughingly replied: "Why, Jute, child. To filter the water."

"'N Leigh tole dis chile it were to cotch all color'd matter," poutingly returned Jute, as she walked away.

"Here are the poems you requested me to obtain for you," said Mr. Fielding, as he handed Lucette a neatly tied square parcel.

"Oh, thanks," joyfully exclaimed Lucette. "I will leave you now, so you can look over your morning correspondence. Be ready in time for our gallop before luncheon. The

groom informed me that 'Snow' was in excellent trim. Bye-bye," she laughingly cried, kissing the tips of her fingers lightly to Mr. Fielding, as she gracefully made her exit from the room.

"How Lucette does love a gallop, bless her dear little heart." Tapping a silver filigree bell, which stood on the massive mahogany table, Jute speedily answered the summons.

"Well, massa," she drawled out, arranging a conspicuous yellow ribbon bow which rested on the top of her frowsy head.

"Bring me some claret and ice, Jute," quietly requested Mr. Fielding. Looking up, he perceived Jute standing still. "Well, why don't you go?" he softly inquired. Jute hesitated a moment, then slowly replied:

"'Kase I'se want to speak to yo', massa. Dis chile's white heart be jist nigh broke to smash," she said, stamping her little foot.

"That is terrible," Mr. Fielding smilingly exclaimed. "I'll—"

"Nebber mind," interrupted Jute. "Doan yo' git escited, massa. Keep yo' temper, 'n I'se tell yo' all 'bout it. Well," she ejaculated, "dat dar red-'aired debbil, Larry Leigh, tole de groom if he cotched dis yer nigger 'roun' dem dar stables agin to tie dis yer

nigger on 'Snow's' back 'n dat would be de las' seen ob a cloud," she sobbingly cried.

"Don't cry, Jute," said Mr. Fielding, kindly patting her kinky black hair. "There shall be no necessity for such an undertaking. Be a good little girl—now run along."

"Massa," impressively exclaimed Jute, stamping her foot and striking a defiant attitude, "jist let dat dar red-'aired debbil scar dis white heart agin' 'n I'se not be 'sponsible fo' any Irish claret dat may be flyin' true de air. 'N say, Massa Feelin'," she continued, slowly turning up the sleeve of her dress and closely examining her muscle, "I'se jist like to git a few pointers from dat dar boxin' master, I would," said Jute, emphatically, as she sauntered in her usual slow gait from the room.

"Poor child," thought Mr. Fielding, adjusting his glasses. "Leigh and Jute seem to be always in trouble." Then reaching over and picking up one of the letters that lay on the table, he opened it and read the following:

NEVADA, October —.

MR. FIELDING,

DEAR SIR: Your immediate attention is required to settle a dispute arising between

the parties who have taken up the claim adjoining the Lucette Mine. They dispute the water right.

Please forward the necessary papers at your earliest convenience to avoid further trouble, and oblige,

Yours sincerely,

CLAUDE GIRRADE.

"This is extremely annoying," thought Mr. Fielding, a frown contracting his brow, as he tossed the letter on the table. "I shall have to attend to this matter in person, as Lucette's interests are at stake. There is not a moment to be lost." Then picking up the second letter from the table, he keenly scrutinized it. A smile lit up his face, as he broke the seal, knowing full well that the letter was from his son, Lieutenant Fielding. An inclosure for Lucette he carefully tucked away into his coat pocket, then he eagerly perused the contents of his boy's epistle.

DEAR FATHER: I have asked for a leave of absence, which has been granted. Expect me home in a few days. I am enjoying tip top health.

Love to all, and a kiss for Lucette.

Your affectionate son,

BERT.

P. S.—Roderick De Monte will accompany me home. I have invited him to be your guest. B.

"I am sorry," thought Mr. Fielding, shaking his head, as he closed his letter. "Sorry Roderick De Monte will pay us this visit—on account of Lucette, whom I have this day learned dislikes my boy's friend. Well, I shall ask Lucette to try to treat De Monte courteously if only for the lieutenant's sake."

Mr. Fielding's soliloquy was cut short by a voice outside, which was no other than Jute's calling: "Jist yo' try dat agin, after I've sarved massa." Jute slowly opened the door from whence her voice proceeded. With measured strides she endeavored to carry a heavily laden tray with extreme caution. She tripped suddenly, however, and through a frantic effort, saved the glasses and beverage from coming in contact with the carpet.

"Good Lordy!" she exclaimed, frightened to death, as she sat the tray upon the table. "Heah be de claret, massa. Do yo' want much or mucher?" she graciously asked, as she proceeded to pour out the wine.

“You should say, ‘Is that sufficient?’” impatiently declared Mr. Fielding. Jute misunderstanding him, answered quickly: “Some *fish* in it? Golly! Dis yer nigger will git a ‘hole string ob dem from de cook in a jiffy.” Wheeling about quickly, she started to go.

“No, no! Come here,” said Mr. Fielding, calling her back. “I didn’t say *fish* in it, I said *sufficient*, meaning it’s *enough*,” said he with marked emphasis.

“Oh! Dar snuff yo’ want?” said Jute, running to a side table, where she took up a box of snuff. Before Mr. Fielding could prevent her, she offered it to him, but accidentally stumbled and fell, spilling it, consequently inhaling some of the contents which immediately brought on a fit of sneezing, and between intervals had she *yet* the courage to pass the box to Mr. Fielding, saying: “Heah am de sneezer, massa. *Dar be one volley left yit.*”

“Tut, tut!” said Mr. Fielding, rising, and endeavoring to wipe Jute’s eyes with his handkerchief. “Here, child, wipe your eyes, and try and be a little more careful,” said he, handing Jute a silk handkerchief, which he took from his pocket. “Tell Lucette, Jute,” said Mr. Fielding, pouring out a glass

of wine and drinking it, "that I will be back here presently. To await me." He then left the room. Hardly had the door closed upon him when Jute curled herself up in a large easy chair, exclaiming aloud:

"Well, I declar' to goodness. De idea ob Massa Feelin' tryin' to umpress '*Webster*' on dis heah chile's cranium. Nuffin' could make 'n umpression on dis heah nigger—"

"But a piece of white chalk," chuckled Larry Leigh, Jute's bugbear, who, during her speech advanced quietly behind her chair. Jute immediately jumped up and confronting him, cried: "Go 'long wid yo'selb, yo' red-'aired linnet," after which she flauntingly turned her back on him.

"That's right," said Leigh, placing a bouquet on the table. Then continuing with an amused smile, he said, looking pertly at Jute: "Call me a birdie—anything you like—from a red-headed linnet to a bird of prey."

Jute glared indignantly at him; then shaking her chubby little black fist, cried: "Yo'll pray when I'se tell Missy Lucette how yo' allus scar me," she stopped suddenly, as she perceived Leigh making a grimace at her. Utterly exasperated, she rushed toward him, shaking her apron in his face. "Shoo! shoo!"

she cried. "Yo' menagerie ob birds, wid yo' firy head 'n yo' round pie-face." Leigh laughingly replied, as he placed his hands upon his hips:

"May I ask you, 'Darkness,' what kind of a conglomeration that may be?"

"Yo' be a gooseberry. Yo' natur'l color, 'kase yo' so green," saucily replied Jute, who by that time reached the door leading out to the veranda.

"O! ho!" said Leigh, following her up. "You remind me of a huckleberry. You're so black."

In Leigh's endeavor to see and have the last word with Jute, his face came in such close proximity with the door that she was about to bang, that he received the full shock of Jute's wrath upon his cheek. Hardly had he recovered from the blow, when Jute poked her little frowsy head from behind the half-open door and cried out: "Yo' seen dem stars and stripes dat time, I bet." She banged the door quickly again and scampered through the hall.

CHAPTER III.

A TRUE FRIEND

"Well, if that little bag of soot isn't the devil," murmured Leigh. Just at that moment Lucette entered the living room. She was strikingly beautiful, as she stood there attired in a riding habit of dark green velvet, and wearing a plumed hat which contrasted well with her azure eyes and golden curls.

"What a lovely morning you will have for your gallop, Miss Lucette," said Leigh, bowing. "The groom informed me that the horses are saddled and waiting."

"I am quite ready, but await Mr. Fielding," returned Lucette, buttoning her gloves.

Taking the bouquet from off the table and presenting it to Lucette, Leigh smilingly said: "I hope you have not forgotten the rosebuds I plucked for you a while ago."

"Thanks. You did not give them to Adele, I see," said Lucette, taking the buds and arranging them on her riding habit.

"Give them to her?" replied Leigh, in a surprised voice. "I'd bestow them on Jute

first, for her to deck her bonny black wool. That I would."

"Hush, hush!" said Lucette, raising her shapely gloved hand. "If Jute were to hear you speak of her in such a manner—"

"Faith," said Leigh, interrupting her. "It's the manner she would well appreciate. If the truth were told, Jute can flit back about as good a compliment as she receives."

"Come, Leigh," coaxingly asked Lucette. "Tell me why you will not be friends with Adele?"

"Our opinions slightly differ. For instance, she may fancy that posies look well on her charming person, while I maintain that they look far better upon the bush," said Leigh, looking up at Lucette.

Lucette shook her pretty head and then slowly said: "That's not a very satisfactory answer. Come, Leigh, tell me the truth."

Leigh tapped his foot impatiently, bit his lip, and then said: "Very well, Miss Lucette. You shall hear the truth. One morning during Lieutenant Fielding's last home vacation I happened to be strolling through the garden. My attention was immediately arrested by Adele Thorn's voice, as she uttered these words: 'Lieutenant Fielding loves Lucette

Westly simply because she happens to be an heiress.' Her companion, no other than Roderick De Monte, replied: 'Yes, indeed, an heirness to a mine that is expected to yield untold wealth is a great catch, and I doubt whether Lieutenant Fielding will let such a prize slip through his grasp.'"

"Is it possible?" answered Lucette. "You can now understand," continued Leigh, "why it is impossible for your governess, Adele Thorn, and I to be friends."

A frown quickly darkened Lucette's cheerful face, as she slowly remarked: "Do you know, Leigh, I have always mistrusted Roderick De Monte and can hardly believe the story that he once risked his own life to save Lieutenant Fielding from a watery grave."

"Miss Lucette," said Leigh, solemnly taking her hand. "I have your sincere welfare at heart. Now rest assured if Lieutenant Fielding loves you, it is for your own sweet self alone. He is both noble and loyal. God bless you both, as I know your little heart is given—"

"Hush, Leigh!" said Lucette, suddenly interrupting him, as a crimson blush overspread her lovely shell-tinted face. "Not another

word, as Adele is very good of late and Roderick De Monte not at all likely to trouble us with his presence here again, promise me one thing. Allow all unpleasant feeling to pass, won't you?"

"I promise you, Miss Lucette," said he aloud; but in his heart he took a solemn vow never to trust either of them.

Lucette immediately extended her shapely hand to Leigh, saying: "I am so glad that you have made me this promise. Thanks, Leigh, a thousand thanks."

"A thousand thanks? Why such a profusion of them?" asked Mr. Fielding, entering the room. He was nattily attired in a stunning riding costume and happened to overhear Lucette's concluding remark.

"Does he not deserve them, Papa Fielding?" she asked, nodding her head toward Leigh. "Look," she smilingly exclaimed, as she drew Mr. Fielding's attention to the rosebuds pinned on her dress.

A luminous smile lit up Mr. Fielding's cheerful face, as he said: "If the horses are ready we had better start. Come, Lucette. Oh! before I forget," continued he, turning to Leigh. "Please have those letters ready for the mail, Leigh."

"Very well, sir," answered Leigh, bowing.

"Now let's be off," commanded Mr. Fielding, hurriedly.

"Remember," cautioned Lucette softly to Leigh, as Mr. Fielding and she passed out on the veranda.

"How my heart goes out to that child," soliloquized Leigh, gazing after Lucette. "In memory of her deceased father, Colonel Westly, my old friend, I would lose my life to shield her from a single pain," then sighing he left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

ADELE'S STRATEGY

"Golly, it am hot!" exclaimed Jute, as she entered the cool living room, carrying a tray of dishes, which she dexterously proceeded to arrange on the table. "I'se jist surprise Missy and Massa Feelin', 'n sarve de lunchen 'rite heah."

The door opened noiselessly and Adele, attired in a dark gray dress of soft cashmere, which clung to her symmetrical form in graceful folds, its somber color relieved by spotless embroidered collar and cuffs, glided quietly into the room. She carried a small work basket on her arm. Seating herself near an open window, she began to crochet.

"Gracious, Missy Adele," ejaculated Jute, looking out of the window and nearly upsetting Adele's workbasket in an endeavor to get a breath of fresh air. "Dem horses worry de lif out ob dis yer chile, but I'se gess Miss Lucette's hoss Snowy's all rite, 'kase she ain't a bit spit'ful."

"I rather think she resembles her mistress in that respect," answered Adele sarcastically,

as she removed the workbasket to safer quarters.

"Ain't Missy Lucette 'n angel?" said Jute, drawing a footstool near Adele. Then sitting down with a bump, she clasped her chubby black hands over her breast and continued, saying: "I'se jist lub Missy Lucette."

"And," answered Adele, under her breath, "I hate her." Then looking up at Jute, she cautioned: "Remember, always to obey your mistress as I do," aside "not."

"Yes, Missy Adele, but sometimes yo' forgit to do what Missy Lucette ax' ob yo'. I'se nebber forgit eny ting she ax' ob me to do 'cept to bridle ma tongue, 'n' I'se kan't eb'n bridle a hoss—'n' hosses are easi'r bridl'd than tongues."

"What makes you think," asked Adele, vehemently, "that I forget to do what your mistress requests of me?"

"'Kase," replied Jute, frowning and puckering up her thick little red lips, "I'se heah Missy Lucette 'quest yo' to do somethin' wid dese yer ears 'n I'se see yo' doan do it wid dese yer peepers," pointing to her eyes.

"Bosh!" sharply said Adele, "you are mistaken."

"Doan yo' reckermember," continued Jute,

shaking her head solemnly, "when Missy Lucette wanted her white lace dress to wear on one certain 'kasion, yo' nebber tole de maid to hab it ready in time. Yo' forgit."

Adele looking up, softly replied, "So I did." Then under her breath she continued: "I did not forget that she would look overhandsome in that same dress."

"Dar yo' see, honey," said Jute, emphatically, "dis yer nigger am rite. Den 'long time ago when Massa Bert comed home on his bacation—"

"Well, well," briefly interrupted Adele.

"Well, Missy Lucette gib yo' a little present to gib him afore he be gwyne away. He nebber receibed it. You' forgit," continued Jute, earnestly, looking at Adele.

"You are dreaming; what present?" said Adele sneeringly.

"Oh, I'se jist know what I'se be talkin' 'bout, honey. I'se see de little ibory kase all rite," Jute answered, in a determined tone of voice.

"A white ivory case?" repeated Adele.

Jute sighed, and putting her hand under her chin, said: "If it hed been a black ebony one, maybe dis yer nigger wouldn't hab

paid eny 'tention to it. I'se jist hate black objects."

"So do I," ejaculated Adele, giving Jute a withering glance, then she continued quickly, saying: "Oh, I guess Lieutenant Fielding received the ivory case all right."

"I say he nebber did," saucily replied Jute. "I say, yo' forgit."

"Little viper," hissed Adele, her eyes flashing with suppressed anger, "prove your assertion."

"I'se will, honey. 'Kase I'se picked it up at de bottom ob de ravine. I'se guess it must hab been full ob water when yo' lost it dar. It be so dirty dis chile didn't reckermember it 'mediately, till I'se forced it open 'n seed Missy Lucette's face smilin' at dis yer chile."

Adele in a state of mental perplexity hesitatingly said: "I do recollect of Lucette asking me to give to Lieutenant Fielding as a parting gift the miniature you have reference to. She being timid concerning the affair. Unfortunately I lost it the very evening he was to return to his regiment. Knowing how badly Lucette would feel should the lieutenant not receive her gift, I searched everywhere for the lost miniature, but in vain.

Therefore I resolved not to mention the incident. Lucette luckily took it for granted that he had the miniature safe in his possession, so that settled the matter. Now *you* come to my rescue."

Jute glanced keenly at Adele and then asked, in an inquiring tone: "Ain't it a little too late, missy?"

"Oh, no," returned Adele sweetly, "return the miniature, and I will have it retaken and forward it to Lieutenant Fielding, just as soon as possible."

"Dis chile was gwyne to do dat herselb when I'se could count up 'nuff nickels," pointedly said Jute, going toward the table.

"Come, Jute, let us seal our bargain," said Adele rising. "Return the miniature; say nothing about the affair and you'll receive a new dress from me and a dozen nickels."

"Nebber mind 'bout de finery, missy. Dis yer chile will git yo' de pictur' to send to Massa Bert, only doan yo' forgit."

Just at that moment the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard on the driveway. Adele arose, crossed the room and looking out of the window exclaimed: "Here comes Lucette and Mr. Fielding returning from their ride!"

Jute ran to the window, peered anxiously

out and excitedly cried: "Oh, Lordy! Yes. I must run now and hab de cook serve de lunchen 'mediately." Then suiting the action to her words, she scampered from the room.

"Great heaven!" exclaimed Adele, clutching the table, until the veins in her hands stood out like whipcords, "what an escape! I wonder if that little black wretch *will* hold her tongue? How I detest Lucette Westly. Poor simpleton!" she hysterically cried. "The idea of giving me her miniature to present to *him*," she cried, clasping her hands to her breast. "Him, whom *I* love. *Never* shall he receive it. During the past year he has probably forgotten all about her; and before he shall see her again I shall do all in my power to make *her* forget *him*."

CHAPTER V.

PREPARING FOR THE VISITORS

A merry peal of laughter rang out upon the air, as Jute cautiously entered the room. She carried a tray of tempting viands, which she placed to the best of her ability upon the table, barely escaping knocking over Lucette's cut-glass rose-bowl, in her endeavor to over-reach herself.

"Gracious! I wonder what would happen if I'se jist done dat," she breathlessly exclaimed, as she realized the impending catastrophe, which she barely escaped. "And won't Missy Lucette be su'prised to hab de lunchen sarved here," she said, as she placed three chairs around the table. "I'se jist picked de whitest posies I'se could find in de garden for Missy Lucette," she said aloud, arranging them in the rose-bowl and placing them in the center of the table. "There," she continued, "they look jist beau'ful," giving them a finishing touch.

"Well, home at last," cried Lucette, dashing into the room, looking radiantly beautiful

from the effect of her morning ride. She was followed by Mr. Fielding.

"Here, child," she said, removing and tossing her riding hat and gloves to Jute. "Now don't put them where some one will be sure to sit on them."

Jute taking Lucette's hat and gloves, eagerly said: "Gess yo' folks be 'bout starved. Eberyting am ready, missy." Turning around on her way to the door, she accidentally dropped Lucette's hat, stumbling over it. Quickly picking it up, she vanished through the doorway, dropping one glove in her hurry on the floor, much to the dismay of Lucette.

"Well," laughingly cried Mr. Fielding. "Jute didn't give one a chance to sit on your hat; she just walked on it," said he, advancing toward the table.

"Come and join us, Adele," cried Lucette, seating herself. "I'm almost famished," she continued, pointing to a chair. "The seat of honor, Adele, sit down. How very thoughtful of Jute to arrange our luncheon here."

"Oh, yes," responded Adele, as she started to partake of her salad.

"By the way," cheerily cried Mr. Fielding, and at the same time producing a letter from his coat pocket. "I received news in regard

to your mine, and shall be obliged to take a business trip in a few days as far as the summit."

"My appetite is now appeased," said Lucette, laying down her fork, "now that my curiosity is excited."

"Cannot some one else attend to this matter?" she anxiously inquired of Mr. Fielding.

"It is hardly possible, Lucette," he thoughtfully answered. Then, passing an envelope to her said: "*This* may interest *you*."

Lucette, glancing at the handwriting, eagerly exclaimed: "A letter from Lieutenant Fielding!"

"Yes," replied Mr. Fielding. "Bert has been granted a leave of absence and is about to pay us a visit."

"Lieutenant Fielding coming home," murmured Adele, in a hushed voice and at the same time turning deathly pale.

Lucette looked at Mr. Fielding, and anxiously asked: "Why didn't you tell me immediately of Lieutenant Fielding's expected arrival? Why did you keep it such a secret? Surely you received the letter this morning. Won't I be delighted to see him?" she continued, her lovely countenance beaming with sudden joy. Impulsively rising, she eagerly

embraced Adele, exclaiming: "Oh, what glorious good times we'll have now! What jolly good times! Won't we, Adele?" she cried, giving Adele a little hug.

"Oh, yes," answered Adele placidly. "I have not the least doubt of it." She suddenly turned, crossed the room and seated herself comfortably in a low rocker, then reaching for her work basket, she was soon busily engaged with its contents, patiently endeavoring to disentangle a ball of worsted.

Lucette lost no time in perusing the contents of her letter, which ran as follows:

DEAR LUCETTE: I am coming home and expect to see my little sweetheart very soon.

How is Adele? Jolly as ever? She may be pleased to learn that Roderick De Monte will accompany me home. Plan plenty of amusement for us, as we anticipate a good time.

Goodby little sweetheart, until we meet,

Yours devotedly,

BERT.

"Pleasant news?" asked Mr. Fielding, as he perceived Lucette folding up her letter.

"Yes, indeed," she answered quickly, then with a perplexed frown continued by asking Mr. Fielding if he were aware that Roderick

De Monte would be likely to accompany Lieutenant Fielding home.

"So I learned from Bert's postscript," replied Mr. Fielding, after a moment of hesitation. "Now, ladies, you must try and make this contemplated visit pleasant for the gentlemen. A *friend* of Lieutenant Fielding's we must always treat most courteously," said he pointedly, glancing at Lucette.

"De Monte coming here? Fate favors me," thought Adele, a cruel gleam of cunning flashing from her eyes.

"Now our guests being due so soon," remarked Lucette, "I shall give orders for immediate preparations. There is not a moment to be lost."

Mr. Fielding, seating himself, said to Adele: "You must lend your kind assistance to Lucette to complete the necessary arrangements."

"Certainly," responded Adele, as she gathered up her work. "I will—to the best of my ability, sir."

"Come, let us hurry, Adele," coaxingly said Lucette, as she encircled Adele's waist and led her toward the door. "I'm so anxious to begin, Adele," she excitedly cried. They left the room together.

CHAPTER VI.

LUCETTE'S REQUEST

"Lucette does not like the idea of Roderick De Monte coming here," thought Mr. Fielding, as he leaned back in his easy chair. "I wonder if Adele is not the real object of his visit here. Well, time will tell."

He picked up a book that was lying upon the table and was just about to open it, when Jute rushed into the room almost scared to death. Her dress was all besmeared with flour. Her face likewise. She held a rolling pin in her chubby black hand. Throwing herself down at Mr. Fielding's feet and at the same time putting one flour daubed hand upon his knees, she tearfully cried:

"Oh, good Lordy, massa! De end ob de world am comin'—'dis poor chile be a sinner."

Mr. Fielding, stooping over, helped Jute to rise. He then drew a silk handkerchief from his inner coat pocket, and proceeded to dust the flour from off his doeskin trousers, and exclaimed, in a surprised voice: "What on earth ails you now, Jute?"

Jute, apparently very much frightened, sob-

bingly cried out: "I'se been down in de kitchen helpin' de cook agin Massa Bert's 'rival, when I'se chance to look up at de window 'n I seed a pair ob terble eyes fasten'd on dis yer chile. I'se jist hollor'd myselb into hysterics 'n de cook tole me if I'se didn't stop dat 'fernal yellin' (boo-hoo), dat she would make dis nicnac (displaying the rolling pin) 'quainted wid ma coconut," simpered Jute, rubbing her frowsy black head.

"Imagination," irritably ejaculated Mr. Fielding, looking at Jute, and shaking his head.

"'Magination, nothin,' massa; I'se did see two terble eyes, sure as yo' born, and Leigh yelled fo' me to sprint, 'kase he said dat gypsy comed to cotch dis nigger, 'kase I'se pester de lib ob all de white folks (boo-hoo). I'se fear'd, massa, dat dat dar terrible gypsy gwyne to grab dis dark chile, so I'se wish, Massa Feelin', yo' would send her 'bout her bisness," then timidly looking around, she wielded the rolling pin above her head, as if to strike an imaginary foe.

"I mistrust those vagrants," said Mr. Fielding, apparently annoyed. Tapping the bell, a servant appeared.

"Jute has just informed me that there is a

gypsy woman lurking about the house, if so, conduct her hither," said he, in a commanding voice.

"Very well, sir," answered the servant, taking his departure.

"Oh, massa, massa," cried Jute, despairingly, clasping her hands and clinging to Mr. Fielding. "I'se don't want to see dat wicked face agin. Surely she be posess'd ob de debbil."

A slight smile flitted over Mr. Fielding's genial face, as he took Jute by the hand, and conducted her to the door of an inner room, cautioning her to remain there until he dismissed the gypsy.

"All rite, massa," replied Jute, in a hoarse tone of voice, trembling with fright. "Gess I'se say ma pray'rs, too. 'Kase she might fotch de debbil 'long wid her."

Hardly had the door closed upon Jute when the servant appeared and ushered in Esperanza, the gypsy girl.

Silently she stood a magnificent specimen of nature's womanly beauty. Her dress—a dark maroon skirt, relieved by an ivory colored blouse, which displayed to good advantage her beautifully moulded breast and arms. Looped from one shoulder and carelessly

crossed hung a scarlet shawl, the color of which certainly enhanced the beautiful dusky face. Her glorious eyes, as Jute, terrified, tried to explain, held one spellbound. They were magnetic, large and lustrous, yet seemingly penetrated through one. Her hair was inky black and braided carelessly in one heavy strand. A string of pebbles adorned her throat.

"Approach, woman," commandingly ordered Mr. Fielding, with a majestic sweep of his arm.

Esperanza eagerly advanced toward him and extending her shapely brown hand, said: "Kind sir, so—I may read your future?"

"I did not send for you to read my future," returned Mr. Fielding, sternly. "I do not believe in such nonsense. I simply want to warn you *NEVER* to cross our threshold again. Go now," continued he, pointing toward the door, "and take heed of my warning."

As Esperanza slowly turned to obey, Lucette slowly entered the room and intercepted her departure. She had changed her riding habit and was becomingly clad in a pale blue linen dress.

"Stay, one moment," she commanded. Then

crossing to Mr. Fielding's side, she asked, caressingly: "You will not refuse me a little favor?"

"What is it?" he asked, abruptly.

"Please allow the gypsy girl to tell you your fortune," she pleaded, then animatedly exclaimed: "Allow her to tell me mine, also?"

"Lucette, I cannot tolerate such nonsense," retorted Mr. Fielding, impatiently.

"Oh, please do?" said Lucette, imploringly, laying her hand coaxingly on his shoulder. "Please grant me this little favor. Won't you, please?"

"How can I refuse you?" assented Mr. Fielding, stroking her curly head between his hands and looking tenderly down upon her. Kissing her lightly then upon the forehead, he beckoned to the gypsy girl, Esperanza.

"Come, woman; proceed."

Esperanza advanced cautiously toward him, her magnetic eyes fastened upon his face, for the moment, then questioningly turning to Lucette, she asked: "Thy future shall the gypsy read, sweet lady?"

"No, no!" replied Lucette, quickly. "The gentleman's hand first," she smilingly indicated.

Esperanza slowly moved toward Mr. Fielding. Taking his extended palm within her own, she said: "Gentle sir, thou art troubled. A great surprise awaits thee. Clouds shall lower and life-blood ebbs away. Tremble, sir, for thou art doomed." She hastily continued excitedly. "Behold I see—"

"Enough woman," said Mr. Fielding, annoyed, withdrawing his hand. "Here is your silver," as he tossed her a coin. "I cannot *endure* this foolishness. Allow me to dismiss this creature," he said, as he partly turned to Lucette.

"Lucette," hissed Esperanza, the gypsy girl, under her breath, then slowly turning her large, dark, penetrating orbs upon Lucette, she stood in dumb amazement.

"Come," implored Lucette, entreatingly to Mr. Fielding, unconscious of the burning look the gypsy girl leveled at her. "I should like my palm read," she entreatingly said. "You promised positively. You—"

"Very well," interrupted Mr. Fielding, curtly. "*Have* your fortune told if you insist. I for my part will retire," said he, gravely, as he opened the door, which led out of the room.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GYPSY'S PROPHECY

Lucette shuddered as the sound of the closed door fell upon her ear. She glanced, nervously, at Esperanza, then hesitatingly said: "You may wait here. I'll be back presently. I am so nervous," she inaudibly acknowledged to herself, "so I'll call Adele," then she left the room, hurriedly. Esperanza left alone gazed slowly around her. A wicked gleam overspread her classic features, as she bitterly soliloquized: "So *this* is her home. She". (gazing in the direction Lucette had taken) "his daughter, aye, little doth thou suspect, Roderick De Monte, that I, the gypsy girl, shadows thy path. That I have gazed upon *her* at last who bears the name I heard thee murmur in thy dreams. Two years ago, Roderick De Monte, thou must have been a guest here. Two years ago we met. Thou swore that thou loved me. Thou betrayed me, and now thy wish is to cast me aside. Fiend," she hissed, excitedly, "so thou art tired of thy gypsy love. Beware, Roderick De Monte, much as I love thee, I could hate

thee more, and woe to her who stands between me and thee. Ah, some one comes," she exclaimed aloud.

"I cannot find Adele anywhere," said Lucette, nervously, entering the room, then seating herself on a small divan, she beckoned Esperanza to take a seat on the footstool at her feet. "I am ready," she said, trembling and offering Esperanza her hand. "Make haste—and tell me true."

Esperanza being seated, inwardly thought: "How I hate to touch her soft white hand!" Yet grasping it, somewhat roughly, she proceeded, saying: "Lady thy life hath been so far a bed of roses, hiding the thorns which therein nestle, only later to wound more deeply. A sudden gleam of brightness falls to thy lot. A fair man—a desolate home—"

"Oh!" said Lucette, shuddering, a frightened look creeping into her face.

"Ah, lady, shrink not. List, thy future—I see it plainly. 'Tis dark—dark as inky night. Thou," slowly shaking her head, "canst not avert it."

"Oh, you—you—tell me such frightful things," cried Lucette, nervously, withdrawing her hand.

Esperanza, looking up sneeringly, asked:

"Art thou a coward? Can'st thou not bear the truth, sweet lady?" She sarcastically continued: "I foretëll only what the lines in your hands portray. See, a life is in danger. It is death, death—" hissed Esperanza, grasping Lucette's hand and riveting her burning gaze fiendishly on her pale face.

"If you persist in telling me such dreadful, terrible things, I really cannot listen to them. I shall die of fright," said Lucette, trembling like a swaying bow.

"Thou must listen, lady," cried Esperanza, clutching Lucette by the arm, in an attempt to drag her from the divan.

"Mark! a gypsy's prophecy," hissed she, with a wild look in her luminous eyes, raising her hand, she excitedly continued: "There *shall* be bloodshed—pools—rivers—crimson in maddening flow. I see them now," dramatically, she exclaimed. "See them rushing between me and thee."

"Enough, father, help," shrieked Lucette. Reeling, she fell in a swoon at Esperanza's feet.

"Have I killed her?" questioned Esperanza to herself, as she gazed contemptuously down on her. "Would that she were forever removed from my path." Quickly drawing a

stiletto from her belt, she hesitated and then thought: "Shall I make sure of her death? Enough, that I have gazed upon her pale face and behold her lying lifeless and helpless at my feet. De Monte shall never know of this meeting," she vowed, as she hastily sheathed her stiletto.

"Hark! They cometh." Looking around. "To escape! Ah, the window! For the path that leads to the cliffs." Hurriedly mounting the steps which led up to the window, she turned and cast a glance of hatred at the prostrate form of Lucette, hissing: "*Coward*, thou doth *fear* thy fate."

Her acute ear hearing a commotion in the adjoining room, she suddenly leaped through the casement window, just as Jute rushed frantically into the room. Screaming and flinging herself down beside Lucette's inanimate form, she hysterically cried: "Help, help! Oh, my poor dear Missy Lucette, I'se knowed dat debbil killed yo; killed ma missy." Her shrill cry of anguish brought Adele, Leigh and Mr. Fielding horror stricken into the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ARRIVAL

It was the morning following the arrival of Lieutenant Fielding and his friend, Roderick De Monte that Jute was seen dodging between the tall trees and the shrubberies which abounded throughout the magnificent grounds that surrounded the Fielding home.

She carried a large white bandbox. Occasionally she threw a glance behind as if she were afraid of someone pursuing her. "Golly!" she chuckingly exclaimed, in an audible whisper, as she set the bandbox down on a rustic bench, which was situated beneath a large spreading ancient oak.

"Well," she thought to herself, looking anxiously around, "I'se gess dis yer coon hab got eben wid dat dar busybody, Larry Leigh, now. He jist chased dis chile 'round de house fo' de las' halb hour, tryin' to find out what Massa Bert fotched dis chile home in dis yer box. I'se got ma bref now, so heah goes to open de luggage."

"Oh, a 'Merry Widow,' shore as yo' born," she joyfully exclaimed aloud, as she quickly

removed the large handsome white felt hat from out of the bandbox, and which she instantly ventured to try on. Meditating: "Swell, Massa Bert, you jist hit de rite size. Sure as lubbers ponder." Then peeping again into the bandbox, she drew forth a small white case, which she nervously opened and smilingly contemplated in curious, joyful surprise.

"Well," she soliloquized, "Massa Bert I'se 'spect jist nigh ruin'd hisselb gibing dis yer black trash all dese walables. Golly! a real lookin' glass in de box, 'n a neclace—'n de errin's—'n de bracelets—dar dey be, de 'hole fambly. Dey look so happy dat I'se jist hate to 'sturb dem, but I'se can't desist de temptation ob tryin' on de 'hole kollection." She proceeded to deck herself with a lavish display of the coral jewels, which she carefully removed from the box.

While Jute was busily engaged in adorning and surveying herself in the looking glass, Larry Leigh quietly advanced from behind a tree and, perceiving Jute, laughingly exclaimed: "Go on, Jute, you'd make a first rate 'Marguerite'—only your a little off color."

"'Tend to yo' own color and doan be so

sneaky. Yo' be jist hoppin' mad kase Massa Bert didn't fotch yo' home a present."

"I'll bet your whole crop of wool he did."

"Sure as lubbers ponder?" asked Jute, opening her big shining eyes.

"Sure as a nigger wonders," replied Leigh, with a spirit of mischief brimming from his soft gray eyes. "And it was all nicely wrapped up in white tissue paper, too," said Leigh, gleefully, rubbing his hands together.

"I'se gess yo' ain't got it now?" said Jute, curiously, edging up to him.

"Guess again. Why not?" asked Leigh.

"'Kase I'se gess yo' red-head would set de tissue paper afire long 'go," she said, laughingly.

"I say, 'Smoky,'" said Leigh, winking his eye, "maybe you *wouldn't* like to take a peep at it?" as he drew forth a parcel from his coat pocket.

"Yes, I'se would," returned Jute, bashfully, advancing nearer to him, decidedly interested.

Leigh waited until Jute was close beside him, then he quickly replaced the package in his pocket, saying: "Well, upon second consideration I'm afraid your little black mug would cast such a reflection on it that, really, you wouldn't be able to tell what it was."

"See here, doan yo' be so fresh," she replied, saucily, sticking up her nose and, picking up the bandbox quickly, she walked toward the house. Before she ascended the steps which led up to the house, she cried out, triumphantly: "Massa Bert will tell dis yer nigger all 'bout dat tissue paper business." She then clumsily ran up the steps of the house.

"Bye-bye, 'Blackbird,'" called out Leigh, as the slammed door hid Jute from view. "My, my," ejaculated Leigh aloud, "but her wings need clipping! Indeed," said Leigh, thoughtfully. "My object in coming this way was by no means mere curiosity, as Jute probably thought, but to keep an eye on our lately arrived, distinguished guest, Roderick De Monte. Here comes the man in question now." Quickly opening a gate that led out on the road, he passed through in order to avoid De Monte, whom he happened to perceive coming that way.

Scarcely had the gate clicked behind Leigh, when Roderick De Monte emerged from one of the garden paths, carelessly carrying a large red rose in his hand. He stopped short and gazed after Leigh's receding form, and then with a sneer on his cold handsome

face, he remarked to himself: "That old fellow is continually stumbling across my path. Probably he is suspicious of me—probably he is right. Lucette Westly, I love," he soliloquized, "and I swear she shall be mine. Nothing shall set aside my purpose now—but Esperanza—my gypsy love of the past," he reflected a moment, then with a bitter, defiant leer, he thought, "I'll easily get rid of her. I'll meet her but once again. Then goodbye to her forever. And Lucette—ah the very thought even now, of Lieutenant Fielding and Lucette being alone together for a moment almost drives me mad."

The morning breeze gently wafted the merry voice of Lucette's saying, "Yes, yes. This way," as she and the Lieutenant approached.

"Ah. voices!" exclaimed De Monte aloud. "This tree," getting quickly behind the large oak "will obscure me until they pass by." De Monte's face assumed an ashy hue, as Lucette and Lieutenant Fielding entered through the open garden gate, arm in arm, and sauntered over to the rustic bench beneath the tree, where De Monte was concealed.

"Surely," said Lucette, sweetly, to the lieutenant, "you must be fatigued by our long

walk. Let us rest under the shade of this glorious old oak," said Lieutenant Fielding. "Now, dear," said he removing his cap and displaying a wealth of chestnut brown hair, the natural tendency to curl setting off his broad, noble brow, "tell me, little one, how have you passed the time since I have been away," said he, lovingly, encircling her waist.

"I'm obliged to listen to their tete-a-tete," thought De Monte, holding his breath in agonized suspense.

"Well," answered Lucette to the lieutenant's question, as she deftly arranged a beautiful tea-rose on her gown. "I devoted most of my time to my music and painting." Then quickly looking up into the lieutenant's face, she sweetly asked: "And you?"

"Shall I tell you?" replied he, stroking her sunny curls. "Well, by thinking little Lucette had forgotten me."

"I *never* could do *that*," she said, bashfully dropping her eyes and carelessly swinging her large garden hat. "Yet—you seem to have forgotten me."

"How so, little one?"

"I received only three letters from you during your entire absence," said Lucette, solemnly.

"Three letters?" exclaimed Lieutenant Fielding, in a surprised tone of voice. "Why, I wrote you fully a dozen."

"Strange. I never received them," answered Lucette, somewhat perplexed.

"Well, no wonder you thought I had forgotten you, Lucette, but I have returned just in time to tell you that I *never* can forget you," he earnestly said, kissing her fondly.

"How eloquent!" blushing returned Lucette, rising. "Allow me," she smilingly continued, as she offered him the rose that had been pinned to the bosom of her dress.

"Thanks. I'll prize this, said he, accepting the rose and pressing it close to his lips. He then placed it carefully in the lapel of his coat.

"Lieutenant Fielding, your father desires your immediate presence in the library," said a servant, approaching the lieutenant. "I will be with him presently." Rising, he turned to Lucette, and taking her hand lightly, kissed it, saying: "I *beg* to be excused. I will see you *later*." Then running up the steps of the house, he waved his hand and cried, "Au revoir." Tossed her a kiss and then the door closed upon him.

"I beg *not* to be excused," said De Monte

to himself, as he slowly came from behind the tree. "I will remain here with her," glancing at the door through which the lieutenant had disappeared. Then suddenly confronting Lucette, he doffed his hat to her courteously, saying: "Good morning, Miss Westly."

"Good morning, Mr. De Monte; how you startled me," said Lucette, moving to the extreme end of the bench on which she was sitting.

"No doubt you were so intently thinking that you did not hear my approach. I hope," he said slowly, "I don't intrude."

"Be seated," answered Lucette, coldly.

"I have enjoyed quite a stroll through the grounds this morning. They look charming, Miss Westly, especially the rose-garden."

"Yes, indeed. Mr. Fielding deserves great praise. He has about the finest collection of roses that are in this section of the country."

"It certainly must be so if *this* is a specimen," said De Monte, keenly, admiring the red rose which he held in his hand. "What a very rich color," he exclaimed, smelling the rose. "The perfume is exquisite." Slightly inclining toward her, he archly offered her the flower. "Surely, you will not refuse it?"

"Thanks," returned Lucette, listlessly accepting the rose and pinning it carelessly on her dress.

"Good," said De Monte to himself. "She accepts my offering," as a cynical smile played about the corners of his mouth.

"I cannot conceive, Miss Westly," he rejoined, turning to Lucette, "how I shall ever be able to tear myself away from this lovely abode."

Lucette indifferently asked. "Then you think of leaving us soon?"

"Far sooner than I wish for. Urgent business compels me to make the sacrifice. Lieutenant Fielding insists, however, that I continue my visit immediately after my business affairs are settled. I hope my visit will be agreeable to you, Miss Westly."

Lucette rising, frigidly answered: "Lieutenant Fielding's friends we shall endeavor to treat courteously, most assuredly. Pray excuse me, Mr. De Monte. We shall meet at luncheon." Bowing rather stiffly, she turned to go into the house.

"Decidedly cool," De Monte sarcastically remarked aloud. A sinister expression shadowed his face, as he nervously twisted his mustache. "I'll win her yet, or *die in the*

attempt. I'll abide my time, and then *beware*, you sweet, pretty elf," soliloquized he, as he hurriedly walked away.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PROPOSED TRIP

Lieutenant and Mr. Fielding were seated beside a table, looking over some papers, in one of the most pleasant rooms the Fielding home possessed—Mr. Fielding's study.

"Well, son, not wishing to mar the pleasure of your recent arrival, I did not inform you immediately that I would be obliged to take an unexpected business trip. Lucette's interests are at stake. There is trouble concerning her mine."

"That is an unfortunate affair," returned the lieutenant, surprised. "I'm sorry. Do you wish me to accompany you, dad? If so, I am at your service."

"And spoil your visit," said Mr. Fielding,

tipping back in his chair. "I'll not hear of it, my boy!"

"Well, if you intend going alone I insist on going with you. I regret leaving Lucette so soon, but I'll be sure to make up for lost time upon our return."

"Well. How about our guest. Your friend, Mr. De Monte?" anxiously inquired Mr. Fielding.

"He will not alter any plans that you may make in the least. De Monte intends to leave us in the course of a day or so to attend to a business transaction of his own."

"I thought that he was likely to remain with us for some time," remarked Mr. Fielding, surprised.

"He will, immediately after his business affairs are settled. The trip with you will be new for me, dad, so let it be understood now that I accompany you."

"As you will, my boy," said Mr. Fielding, pleasantly yielding.

"I wish to speak seriously to you, my son," said he, laying his hand gently upon the lieutenant's shoulder. "I am going to ask you rather an embarrassing question. What are your intentions toward Lucette?"

"Both gentlemanly and honorably," replied

he, raising his truthful eyes and looking clearly into his venerable father's face.

"Then you love her, my son?" he breathlessly asked.

"Love her, probably more than you even dream of. But," said he, sighing and slightly shrugging his shoulders, he continued: "Lucette is an heiress. Were she a poor girl, I would not hesitate a moment to lay my heart at her feet."

"Your pride, my boy, then prevents you from doing what your heart dictates," said Mr. Fielding, rising and lighting his cigar.

"Frame it as you will, father, but I should detest being classed as a fortune seeker."

"Who would be base enough to associate your actions as such?" indignantly inquired Mr. Fielding.

"Somehow, it has been whispered about my regiment that I evidently have an heiress in view. My comrades do not openly accuse me of being at all love-sick, hence the rumor—it's the *fortune*, not the lady so much in question."

"Could De Monte be the instigator of that report?" inquired Mr. Fielding, suspiciously.

"De Monte?" repeated Lieutenant Fielding, a look of intense surprise overspreading his

manly countenance; then after a moment's pause, he continued, in a piqued voice: "I regret, father, to see you disloyal, even in thought, to our guest. Do you forget that we are indebted to De Monte for saving my life?"

"Ah, yes, my boy. But the proof—the proof," questioned Mr. Fielding, emphatically.

"What more proof—than when I regained consciousness in a fisherman's hut after being rescued from a watery grave, I beheld Roderick De Monte administering to my wants. He was dripping wet and seemed completely exhausted,"

"I wish I could bring myself to believe as you do," said Mr. Fielding perplexed.

"Ah, dad," reproachfully replied the lieutenant, slowly shaking his head. "You seem to mistrust my friend."

"Are you aware that Lucette does likewise?"

"Well, no. I thought De Monte being a handsome fellow, that Lucette would be more likely to be charmed with him than otherwise," bluntly said the lieutenant.

"And were she charmed with him," hesitatingly said Mr. Fielding, "there would be

one more miserable man in the world—loving her as you do?”

“Concerning love, dad,” quickly responded the lieutenant, “I believe in giving a woman full sway. Her heart is her own to bestow on whom she may please. Should De Monte win Lucette—I would resign my suit without a murmur.”

“Never fear. I believe his attentions are bestowed on Adele Thorn,” said Mr. Fielding.

“By the way,” said the lieutenant, seriously, “De Monte did receive a number of letters postmarked California. Probably he did leave his heart in fair Adele’s keeping after his first visit here with us. If so—I wish them joy.”

“Then it is a settled fact,” remarked Mr. Fielding, looking at his watch, “that we journey together.”

“By all means, dad,” replied the lieutenant, yawning, then rising from the chair, he walked across the room and threw himself down upon the luxuriant leather couch. “I have letters to write which must be ready for the mail, so I will leave you for a while,” said Mr. Fielding, replacing a book on the table, after which he quietly left the room.

The lieutenant reaching for a newspaper

that happened to be lying on the couch beside him, had scarcely become absorbed in its contents when he was interrupted by Jute bolting noisily into the room.

"Oh, dar yo' be, Massa Bert." Then looking solemnly at him, she continued: "Massa Bert, yo' nebber tell fibs, do yo'?"

"Never; never tell them," he seriously answered, jumping up quickly.

"'Kase dis chile wants to know if yo' fotched Leigh home a present all 'rapped up in tissue paper?"

"Yes. I—brought him a revolver," said the lieutenant, in a blustering voice.

"Oh," said Jute dejectedly.

"Are you afraid of firearms?" asked the lieutenant, in an inspiring military tone of voice, looking keenly at Jute.

"No. Nor 'fraid of fireheads," she energetically said, striking her little black fist upon the table.

"Come. Come Jute," laughingly said the lieutenant. "I see you are dead against Leigh. I think him a right good fellow."

"Massa Bert, dis yer chile won't 'spute what yo' say, ony tell dat warm lookin' gen'-man to hab a certain 'guard fo' dis yer nigger's temper."

"Come along with me, Jute," said he, taking her by the hand, a broad smile illuminating his face, "and we'll settle this difficulty at once."

"Is yo' gwyne to git yo' gun, Massa Bert?" asked Jute, anxiously, as she left the room joyfully with the lieutenant.

CHAPTER X.

THE CONSPIRACY

The sun was high in the heavens, the little love birds that had flitted from tree to tree so joyously during the pleasant early morn were now quietly nestling among the trees sheltered from the noonday heat. The peaceful quietude that reigned within the magnificent grounds of the Fielding home was relieved only by the little love birds' occasional twitter and the buzzing of the bees that flitted from flower to flower to rob them of their sweets. The rustling of the dry October

leaves signaled the presence of a woman who was cautiously making her way through the shrubbery. It was none other than Adele Thorn. Her dress was of a light green material, which was in keeping with the warm day. Her hat, a wide-brimmed affair, was covered with dainty daisies. She looked cautiously about, turned, and suddenly confronted Roderick De Monte, who evidently had been expecting her.

"For once, Adele, you are punctual," said he, looking at his watch.

"I have just a few moments to spare," said Adele, hurriedly, "so let us come to an understanding at once. Shall we continue to work for the benefit of each other's interest?" asked he, his eyes anxiously scanning her face.

"Go on," she sullenly replied, "I am listening."

"You love Lieut. Fielding," said De Monte, slowly. "I love Lucette Westly. Neither loves us in return; great consolation, that. But they *shall* in spite of every obstacle," he said, a dangerous light creeping into his eyes.

"Then you have lied to me, Roderick De Monte!" said Adele, in a deliberate tone of voice. Then turning quickly, her eyes flash-

ing indignantly, she continued: "*Lied* to me by leading me to believe that Lieut. Fielding cared for me. You have used me simply as your dupe to meet your own selfish ends. I told you neither of us would succeed." She choked back the tears that already dimmed her eyes.

"Not succeed when I have sworn Lucette Westly shall be mine?" said he excitedly.

"Why have you led me to believe that Lieut. Fielding loved me?" she asked in a quivering voice. "Never has he breathed a *word* of love to me," she continued, sorrowfully; and, plucking a rose, she held it in close proximity to her face, and which served to catch her falling tear.

"Most assuredly," pointedly said De Monte. "Lieut. Fielding cannot help but notice that you are extremely reserved toward him; naturally he feels timid about confessing his love for you," said he hesitatingly.

"You really think so?" replied Adele coolly, looking him straight in the face.

"I know it, positively," asserted De Monte, as he sat down on the rustic bench beside Adele. "Now, take my advice, Adele. Make yourself over agreeable to Lieut. Fielding whenever the slightest opportunity presents

itself. Do not allow Lucette to stand a moment in your way. Both you and the lieutenant are handsome and charming. You'll win him sure." Just at that instant the sound of a bell was heard.

"I must be going," said Adele. "That is the first luncheon bell. I'll meet you here tonight," she said briefly, as she quickly walked away.

"Ah! She was about to turn traitor," remarked De Monte, sarcastically, to himself, as he watched her lithe form disappear among the trees. "I have calmed her fears for the present," he thought, "and I guess I can depend upon her to keep Lucette and the lieutenant apart until my return."

"Ah! Miss Westly," said De Monte, as Lucette ran lightly down the steps, and then walked over to the bench on which De Monte was lounging. "Back again?" he cheerily asked.

"I had forgotten my sunshade," she said, looking around. "This must be it," cried De Monte, as he reached down and picked up her parasol, which had fallen behind the rustic seat.

"Thanks," she returned curtly. "The sun is so strong," she said, as she opened it.

Just then the door leading to the veranda opened, and Lieut. Fielding made his appearance. Perceiving De Monte and Lucette, he quickly ran over to them. Slapping De Monte good-naturedly on the shoulder, said: "Well, old boy, I have been looking all over for you. Enjoying yourselves?" he inquired, quizzingly, looking at them.

"Miss Westly and I have passed the time pleasantly," remarked De Monte, with a suave smile.

"How presumptuous," thought Lucette to herself, a frown knitting her serene brow.

"Strolling about the garden, I suppose," cheerfully asserted Lieut. Fielding.

De Monte, ignoring his assertion, quickly asked the following question: "Bert, you remember of plucking me a rose this morning?"

"Yes; one of our choicest specimens. Why?" he anxiously asked.

"Miss Lucette bears the trophy of your labor," said he, pointing to the rose on Lucette's dress.

Lucette looked bewildered for a moment, then suddenly glancing at the forgotten rose which De Monte had induced her to accept in his cunning way earlier in the morning, a

sarcastic smile passed over her fair oval face.

Lieut. Fielding, somewhat confused and surprised, made no outward remark; but, glancing quickly at Lucette, the thought flashed through his mind, "Strange, Lucette dislikes this man, yet accepts his offerings." Then tossing off the slight depression that seemed to overcome him, he smilingly said: "By the way, Rod, old boy, dad is obliged, I am very sorry to say, to take a business trip in the course of a day or so, and I am to accompany him. Would you like to make the trip with us? It is, I believe, in the same direction as you intend going."

"Why! Are you all thinking of going away so soon?" asked Lucette in breathless surprise.

"Yes, Lucette. It is unavoidable. It is business concerning your mine," said Lieut. Fielding, seriously.

"You will surely come in contact with some wild beasts among the 'Sierras.' I am sorry you are going to that wild section. I will speak to your father about this contemplated journey. It is too bad—all our enjoyment—spoiled. Excuse me, gentlemen," she said, brushing back a tear from her lustrous blue eyes. She walked quickly

away, mounted the stairs with a bound, and passed into the house.

"What a tender-hearted little creature," said the lieutenant, gazing after her, sighing, as he watched her retreating form. "She imagines we will have to face danger." De Monte appeared to be in a deep study for a moment, then turning to Lieut. Fielding, he ventured carelessly to suggest: "You leaving so soon; probably we could travel part of the way together."

"Good; I wish we could induce you to make the entire trip with us. The scenery is divine. The hunting superb. You, no doubt, have passed through the 'Sierras.'"

"Oh, certainly," De Monte drawlingly answered; then bitterly thought: "'Twas there, among those mountains, Esperanza, the gypsy girl, first crossed my path."

"Well, after our business affairs are settled, we will indulge in a perfect whirlwind of pleasure. I wish to enjoy myself and take a good rest before I return to my regiment." Offering De Monte a cigar, he said: "We have a few moments yet, before lunch. Come, allow me to show you our aviary." And linking his arm within De Monte's, they passed down the path together.

CHAPTER XI.

JUTE'S OUTING

"Phew!" exclaimed Larry Leigh, wiping off the beads of perspiration that oozed from his brow. "It's pretty hot." Leigh had just left the post office, where he had received three letters. Assorting them, he quietly remarked: "Two for Mr. Fielding, and one for Roderick De Monte." Earnestly scrutinizing the letter that was addressed to De Monte, he remarked: "Soiled envelope, and the direction misspelled. It's a mystery, like himself." Placing the letters in his coat pocket, he spied Jute coming toward him, dressed in a white linen suit, and wearing the new bonnet, "Massa Bert fotched her home." She was strutting along the walk, tilting a large rose-colored sunshade (evidently one that Lucette had discarded), and unconscious of Leigh's presence.

"Hello, Jute. Where are you bound for? I hardly knew you. You look so 'swell,'" said Leigh, intercepting her.

"How does this coon look in her new rig?" she asked, turning around for Leigh to have

a chance to survey her finery. "I'se gwyne on a message fo' Missy Adele," she asserted, with a slight little tilt of her nose.

"On a mash, eh? Faith, I wouldn't be surprised but what you could mash some ebony dude."

" 'N ebony dude wouldn't bite as readily as yo' red-errin," said she, tilting her head back, and walking hastily away.

Leigh, gazing intently after Jute, raised his hand, and was about to give vent to his surprise, when "Criss," a nigger dude, happened to be coming down the street at break-neck speed, and bumped accidentally into Leigh's back. Leigh, turning suddenly around in an endeavor to see what struck him, happened to knock Criss's hat off.

"Go 'long," sulkily muttered Criss, as he stooped to regain his hat. "What yo' take de 'hole sidewalk fo'?"

"Hold on, Coon," said Leigh grasping him tightly by the coat collar, "until we explain matters a bit. Next time don't you try to send your body through a man's shoulder blade."

"I say. Let dis gen'man go. I'se lose sight ob ma gal," yelled Criss, struggling to free himself.

"What gal? You mean the little nigger that just went by," angrily asked Leigh.

"Yes, sah."

"You know her, do you?"

"No, sah. But if yo' give dis gen'man a chance I will," returned Criss, endeavoring to free himself from Leigh's sturdy grip.

"You will, will you?" said Leigh, giving him a punch. "Willy-boy; well, you won't."

"Let go! Help! Perlice!" cried Criss, as Leigh engaged him in an angry tussle. "Now I am through with you—you possum. And mind now, don't you follow a decent girl again in a hurry." Picking up Criss's hat he tossed it toward him. "Skit," he cried. "I'll scalp you. Do you mind that, now? Scoot."

Criss immediately took to his heels, and almost flew down the street, much to the disgust of "Toughy," a little newsboy, who had whistled up all "de gang" to witness a real live set-to.

"I wonder if Jute would be convinced now," soliloquized Leigh, endeavoring to tie his cravat that had become disarranged during the impromptu mixup. "That an ebony dude took water more readily than the red-herring."

"Faith, it's pretty nigh dusk. I have lost

too much valuable time already, as Mr. Fielding and the lieutenant depart early tomorrow morning. Ha! Ha! Late as usual. The first star out. Sorry, but it's all over," murmured Leigh, as a burly officer of the law strutted by. "Toughy" and "de gang" immediately gave him the merry ha, ha, and sprinted away eager for a chase from the lone, foot-sore bluecoat.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EXCHANGED ROSE

Twilight was creeping silently on, as Leigh raised the latch of the massive gate that led into the grounds that surrounded the Fielding mansion. The library was ablaze with light, and it was there that Leigh quickly directed his steps. Mr. Fielding and the lieutenant was seated beside a large oak table looking over some documents.

"Yes; all our necessary arrangements are at last completed, so now we are ready in time for our departure," said Mr. Fielding, with a satisfactory look at the lieutenant, who was absorbed in the classification of some papers.

"Lucette feels dreadfully depressed over the prospect of our journey," said the lieutenant, looking up sadly.

"Indeed she does, poor girl," assented Mr. Fielding, as Leigh softly entered the room. "Good evening," gentlemen. Here is the mail," said he, producing the letters and laying them upon the table.

"Leigh, be seated a moment," requested

Mr. Fielding, as he glanced at the letters. "I have a request to ask of you. During my absence I will entrust Lucette, whom I prize as my life, in your care until my return," said he, grasping Leigh's hand firmly.

"I have but one life to lose," he answered, returning Mr. Fielding's grasp of the hand. "Willingly would I lose it in Miss Lucette's behalf. She shall, during your absence, Mr. Fielding, be my special care."

"Bravely spoken," cried Lieutenant Fielding. "I understand that Roderick De Monte journeys with you," remarked Leigh, in a measured tone, as he looked first at Mr. Fielding and then at the lieutenant.

"Only part of the way," gravely replied Mr. Fielding.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said Leigh, rising and looking somewhat perplexed, "if I express an opinion. I don't like that man De Monte. Take a true friend's advice. Don't trust him too far."

"Strange, none of you seem to be over-partial where my friend De Monte is concerned," said Lieut. Fielding, in an injured tone.

"Pardon me," returned Leigh, a flush mantling his cheek, "probably I should not

have mentioned this subject; still I have a reason for doing so."

"I know, Leigh, you are interested in our welfare," remarked the lieutenant, as he gently laid his hand upon Leigh's shoulder. "So no apology from you, old fellow."

"Leigh," interrupted Mr. Fielding, "what has become of Chesterfield's address. It is very essential. I must have it."

"It is in your private desk, sir," answered Leigh.

"Well, then," said Mr. Fielding, rising, "we will go and look it up."

"At your service, sir," returned Leigh, following in Mr. Fielding's footsteps.

The lieutenant, left alone, wondered why Lucette had not as yet put in an appearance. Hearing some one approach, he looked up quickly, expecting it were she. The door opened and Adele entered, carrying a chess-board.

"Good evening, Lieutenant. Alone?" she coquettishly asked.

"Can you tell me what detains Lucette?" asked the lieutenant, evading her question.

Always Lucette, she snappishly thought, a scowl darkening her otherwise pretty face.

She answered coldly, saying: "Lucette complained of a headache."

"Indeed?" said the lieutenant disappointedly, as Adele seated herself comfortably in the dark leather easy-chair.

"I've lost patience with Lucette," petulantly continued Adele. "She is the most whimsical child I ever came in contact with. I insisted upon her joining us tonight—it being your last evening at home. She consented, but scarcely had I reached the door of her room, ere she changed her mind, and indifferently said *probably* she would see you in the morning before your departure." (*Exultingly aside*): "It was at my suggestion."

"I regret very much to be deprived of Lucette's company," said the lieutenant in a somewhat hurt voice.

"Were I in her place," said Adele, rising, "I would gladly sacrifice my feelings once in a while to please my friends." Then, drawing near the lieutenant, she archly looked up, exclaiming: "Oh, what a lovely rosebud!" alluding to the boutanniere he wore.

"Do you really admire it?" he asked pleasantly.

"And mean to have it," replied Adele, taking the rosebud deftly from his lapel. "How fra-

grant it is," she continued as she inhaled its perfume.

"I don't wish to part with that bud. *I must have it back again.* Please, Miss Adele," he said anxiously, extending his hand.

"*Must have it?*" she answered, coquettishly hiding the rose behind her. "No, no. Just to punish you a little, I will not give it back," she poutingly replied.

"Please, Miss Adele. Give me the rose," he repeated quite seriously, and looked very sternly at her.

"I'm so sorry," she said, looking amazed, and at the same time tossing back her queenly little head, "but I have already said no, and I never like to break my word. It's awfully sweet," she continued, smelling the rose, "and there are plenty more in the rose-garden; so," she said poutingly, "please do not begrudge me this simple little token on the eve of your departure."

Lieutenant Fielding shrugged his shoulders and resignedly said: "You having possession, Miss Adele"—

"Is nine points of the law," interrupted Adele, laughingly. "The bud is mine. Thanks," taking it for granted she had won her point. Then, pinning the bud upon her

dress, a radiant smile lit up her face in victorious triumph. Discerning the lieutenant's dejected look, she exclaimed: "What a serious face! I shall be obliged to awaken Lucette to see if she can make you smile."

"Under no circumstances shall I allow Lucette to be disturbed," replied he, seating himself.

"Good. I managed to keep them apart for tonight," thought Adele happily.

"Say, Missy Adele, Missy Lucette wants yo' 'mediately," cried Jute, unceremoniously popping her frowsy head in at the door.

"I'll be with her presently," said Adele, nervously glancing at the lieutenant.

"Al rite, Missy. Only doan yo' forgit," said Jute, as she warningly lifted her little black finger, before she banged the door behind her.

"Have you any message for Lucette?" asked Adele of the lieutenant as she was about to leave the room.

"My regrets that she is ill, and I hope to see her before I leave."

"I deliver that message? Never," said Adele under her breath, as she took her departure.

"All alone, Master Bert? Where are all

the ladies?" inquired Leigh, entering the room; after which he was soon engaged in selecting a book from the library shelf. "Your father was asking for you," he resumed.

"All right, I'll go with you now and we'll find dad," said the lieutenant, rising. Both gentlemen then went in quest of Mr. Fielding.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CLANDESTINE APPOINTMENT

Anxiously pacing up and down the walk in front of the Fielding home, Roderick De-Monte suddenly halted. The full moon casting its reflection o'er his face, revealed a pallid, worried, anxious countenance. Stepping toward the stone steps which led up to the house, he paused directly beneath the garden lamp, which was held in the hands of a bronze goddess. Consulting his time-piece, he scowlingly remarked to himself: "Adele is later than usual; however," look-

ing cautiously around, "I will peruse the contents of this letter, which I had almost forgotten. Evidently from my gypsy love," he sneeringly said aloud, a malicious grin settling o'er his features. Tearing open the envelope, he perused the epistle, which read as follows:

"Mine Own Roderick:

"The days linger, the nights seem to lengthen since thou hast left me alone. Why dost thou roam? Three moons shall I await thy coming. Should'st thou fail, a gypsy's vengeance shall shadow thy path.

"ESPERANZA."

"Dare she threaten me?" said he, tearing the letter to fragments. "I'll soon stop her pretty warnings. She shall never come between Lucette and I. Curse her!" he venomously hissed as he walked away, his form lost to view mid the dark foliage.

De Monte barely missed Leigh, who, at that very moment crossed the garden and mounted the steps leading up to the house. His acute ear caught the sound of a rustling between the trees. He suddenly stopped, and peering into the darkness, thought, "I wonder if that can be De Monte. If so, I don't like his actions." He then cautiously opened the door of the mansion.

"Roderick! Roderick! Where are you?" softly called Adele, who had just entered the grounds through the garden gate.

"Late as usual. I have been waiting some time," impatiently said De Monte, emerging from the shrubbery.

"Congratulate me. I have seen the lieutenant," said Adele eagerly.

"Did you succeed in winning a smile from him?"

"If not," replied Adele, sarcastically, "I did a favor for you. Lucette and the lieutenant will be kept apart for the evening."

"Good. How did you manage it so adroitly, Adele?"

"Lucette complained of a headache, most likely a heartache. I told her that she was looking miserable, and had better not leave her room. The little simpleton did exactly as I bade her."

"So you had the lieutenant all to yourself," said De Monte, with a smile.

"Precisely, until Jute informed me that Lucette desired my presence. I was on my way to her room when I remembered that you were waiting for me here."

"Listen," said De Monte, "I cannot state exactly how long I may be detained away.

Should Lieutenant Fielding arrive home sooner than I, endeavor to keep them apart. You will be working for your own interests as well as mine. Should I wish to communicate with you, where shall I address my letters?"

"We had better not carry on any correspondence at all. Impart every detail to me on my return." Suddenly listening, he said, "I thought I heard a rustling among those trees. Probably we are watched," resumed he suspiciously.

"Nonsense; 'tis the wind," returned Adele reassuringly.

"I wonder if Leigh, the old secretary, is prowling about? At any rate, let us return to the house. Most likely we shall be missed," said he, offering her his arm.

"Very well," she said, as she accepted his arm. "Lucette awaits me. So let us hurry," she rejoined, as they disappeared through the gloam.

CHAPTER XIV.

RODERICK DE MONTE'S VOW

The lights were still ablaze in the cheerful living room as Lucette softly entered, arrayed in a blue robe of silken sheen. Her mass of golden curls was carelessly looped in a soft knot which did not fail to hide the exquisite shape of her graceful, snowy neck. Gazing around the room with a surprised, bewildered air, she exclaimed aloud: "Deserted! No one here! I thought I would go wild waiting alone in my room. Such a strange feeling is o'er me tonight—a presentiment as if something dreadful was going to happen. Oh, Bertie!" she cried, "Why must you leave us so soon? All this miserable parting—just on my account! Dear me! Dear me!" she cried with a burst of anguish, as she threw herself down on a chair, laying her golden head on her dimpled white arm which rested on the table.

The door opened quietly and Lieutenant Fielding entered. Perceiving Lucette he quickly approached. Bending gently over her bowed head he patted her golden curls, say-

ing, "Hello, little one; what is the matter now?" Lucette, looking up, quickly asked, "Oh, is it really you, Bert?"

"I thought I was to be deprived of the pleasure of your company this evening," returned Lieutenant Fielding.

"I had a headache, but it has passed."

"Have you seen Adele?" the lieutenant inquired.

"Indeed, I have not. I became very tired waiting for her. She would object to my leaving the room at any rate."

"Well, you are here," said he caressingly. "I'm perfectly delighted," he continued, imparting a kiss upon her snowy brow. "Now I *am* happy," said he, leading her to the settee. "Come now, dear; banish that sober look from your sweet little face."

"Bertie," she remarked seriously, "do you know that I have a persentiment that something dreadful is going to happen?"

"Oh, pshaw! Drive such foolish fancies away," said he, laughingly.

"I have felt so queer ever since that gypsy woman frightened me with her terrible prophecy."

"A gypsy?" questioned the lieutenant, surprised.

"Yes; I shudder to recall the scene."

"Well, where did you meet a gypsy?" the lieutenant asked, amused.

"She came here to our home. Much to my sorrow, I allowed her to read my palm. She predicted such a fearful future for me that I finished by falling into a swoon, and she immediately made her escape by jumping from the window, all trace of her being lost. Can you blame me in the least for feeling nervous over your departure?"

"Attach no significance to this wandering ranter. Forget all her ramblings for my sake."

"Well, all I can do is but try," she responded, a faint smile o'erspreading her demure little face.

"I trust we may return home safe and promise that I shall never close my eyes without picturing your sweet face before me. My constant thoughts will be of you, Lucette," said he, gently embracing her. He then arose from the settee as the door suddenly opened and Adele swept majestically toward them.

"Beg pardon," she said, haughtily bowing. Then with a tinge of irony in her voice she exclaimed, "You here after all, Lucette!"

"Yes," replied Lucette, "I changed my mind."

Adele, seating herself beside Lucette and glancing at the lieutenant, said, "Whimsical, as usual." Then laughing lightly she resumed, "A great failing of Lucette's."

"Good evening, folks," said Roderick De Monte, leisurely sauntering into the room, his large eagle eyes resting inquiringly on Adele.

"I thought that they were to be kept apart," commented he to himself.

"Sit down, Rod, old boy; make yourself comfortable!" cried the lieutenant, motioning to an easy chair. "Where have you been? It's high time you came out of your shell."

"Mr. De Monte was obliged to seek solace in the moonlight, owing to the ladies deserting him," said Adele quietly, looking at Lucette.

"Accept my apology," murmured Lucette, bowing.

"Mine also," said Adele, making a mock courtesy.

"Ladies, you do me too much honor," said the gallant De Monte, nervously rubbing his hands together.

"I see you are enjoying yourselves," remarked Mr. Fielding, entering the room and

joining the throng. "That's right; don't let me disturb you. Have you those documents, Bert?" he inquired of the lieutenant.

"Yes, father; here they are. The papers you mislaid, concerning the water right to Lucette's mine," said the lieutenant, taking the papers from his coat pocket and passing them to Mr. Fielding.

"Ah, the papers!" repeated De Monte under his breath.

"Thank you, my son. I think they will be safe here," said Mr. Fielding, placing them in his inner coat pocket.

"Strange that Girrade could not have saved us all this unnecessary trouble by searching the records," thoughtfully remarked the lieutenant.

"That's the trouble," returned Mr. Fielding, "the records have been destroyed and the parties who have taken up the adjoining claim take advantage of the situation. These papers are of great value to me at the present time."

"Those papers shall be in my possession," decided De Monte to himself, as a sinister expression passed over his countenance.

"Have those papers recorded as soon as possible, dad," suggested the lieutenant emphatically.

"Yes, do!" chimed in Lucette, "else the gypsy's prophecy——"

"Hush!" said Lieutenant Fielding, holding up a warning finger to silence Lucette's further information on the subject.

"What do you mean, Miss Westly?" asked De Monte, suddenly becoming interested.

"Oh," said Lieutenant Fielding, quickly replying for Lucette, "the little one here has been told some dreadful nonsense of late."

"By whom, pray?" asked Adele, innocently.

"Surely, you all witnessed the effect it had upon me," replied Lucette.

"Ha, ha, I understand," laughingly rejoined Adele. "You'll not want your fortune told again in a hurry, dear," she said, patting Lucette upon the shoulder. She then arose and crossed the room.

"Believe me, never," emphasized Lucette.

"Where did this gypsy hail from?" asked the lieutenant, seating himself beside Lucette.

"Hard to tell," replied she, with a deep sigh.

"A gypsy?" questioned De Monte, inquiringly.

"Yes, it's not likely she'll venture here again," responded Lucette, impatiently, rising.

"A gypsy woman, did you say? What did she want?" asked De Monte, partaking of a small cup of coffee which Jute at that moment offered him.

"Pray don't ask me. I am only too happy to forget her," replied Lucette, with a shudder, as she dropped a lump of sugar into her coffee cup.

"Who, dat gypsy?" quickly asked Jute, who was busily engaged in arranging the coffee service. "I'se say she be terrible. She be de debbil's twin."

"Jute, you were not frightened one bit," said Mr. Fielding, addressing the little black midget.

"Oh! sure massa," she drawlingly answered, in a mournful voice, and nearly upsetting a steaming cup of coffee over Mr. Fielding's trousers.

"She jist graved her image on dis yer chile's cranium fo' ebber."

"Tell us about it, Jute," said De Monte, as a perplexed expression settled on his face.

"She hab two black snak'y eyes, dat

when she looked at yo', yo' felt lik' a 'lectric battery craulin' down yo' back," described Jute.

"Exactly," sighed Lucette.

"Her hair," continued Jute, "be de color ob mine, on'y not——"

"So curly," interrupted Adele, snickering.

"No," Jute, vehemently replied, "it be straiter like yo' own, when yo' forgit to 'rap de tea-lead 'round it ebery night."

"Little viper," said Adele to herself, her face turning a brilliant scarlet.

"Jute," said Lucette, reprovingly, "I am astonished."

"The negress' description goes for naught," thought De Monte to himself.

"But missy," humbly said Jute, after Lucette's rebuke. "What scar'd dis chile most was de long red mark she hed on her arm."

"'Tis Esperanza," said De Monte to himself, his breath coming fast, his bosom panting with suppressed rage.

"I'm glad I didn't see the red mark you speak of," said Lucette.

"Mr. Fielding, you should guard against those vagrants," asserted De Monte in a demonstrative tone.

"I hardly think we will be troubled again by that class in the future. Come, gentlemen, suppose we have a game of chess," said Mr. Fielding, crossing the room and preparing the table for the game.

"Massa," said Jute, edging to the door, "yo' jist carry a box ob rat biskit to hab on han fo' dose gypsies. Den, if dey be friens wid de debbil, he'll sho' dem sympathy wile dey be a kickin'." She closed the door and made her usual exit by letting the tray fall with a crash, which set everyone's nerves on edge in the adjoining room.

"Jute's a case sure," said the lieutenant, as he proceeded to start the game.

"Her tongue will certainly get her into trouble some day," said Adele, snappishly, seating herself.

"Enjoy your game, gentlemen," said Lucette, rising; "we'll not disturb you." Placing a footstool at Adele's feet and seating herself upon it, she glanced over at the gentlemen who were already absorbed in their game of chess.

"Jute did not mean to be saucy, Adele," said Lucette, looking up into her governess' face, "I shall reprimand her when we

are alone. Believe me, it will not occur again."

Adele did not deign to answer, but bit her lip in bitter resentment.

"The pawns are moving," said Mr. Fielding, interested in the game.

"What a pretty rosebud," exclaimed Lucette, as she espied the bud on Adele's corsage.

"Lovely," replied Adele, glancing at the bud which certainly relieved the monotony of her dark dress. Then to herself she triumphantly said: "I'm so glad she noticed it."

"Where did you get it, if I may ask. You seldom wear a rose."

"The lieutenant gave it to me."

"Indeed, when?" asked Lucette, opening her large azure eyes with intense surprise.

"The game is looking somewhat confused, gentlemen. Now I have to make a careful move," said the lieutenant thoughtfully.

"When?" answered Adele, not noticing the lieutenant's interruption. "Why, during a brief happy hour spent with the lieutenant when he presented me with this token."

"Things are looking shady. I am com-

pelled to make *this* move," said DeMonte to the lieutenant.

"The rosebud I gave *him*," sadly said Lucette to herself.

"It's only a trifle for a farewell," cried Adele exultingly, as she noticed the demure look on Lucette's countenance.

"Beware! You are on the verge of losing your knight, my son," anxiously exclaimed Mr. Fielding.

"So Lieutenant Fielding really gave that bud to you," asked Lucette hesitatingly.

"If you doubt my word the lieutenant will verify it," sarcastically answered Adele.

"Checkmated. I'm done for—lost!" cried Lieutenant Fielding, leaning back in his chair.

"Bertie gave her the rosebud because he thought DeMonte's flowers were acceptable to me," said Lucette to herself, as she arose and walked over to the chess table.

"She's piqued," sneeringly thought Adele, as her glance followed Lucette across the room.

Well, gentlemen, who lost the game?" inquired Lucette.

"I did, to be sure," said the lieutenant,

arising and lighting a cigar. His announcement was greeted by a peal of laughter.

"He always shall if it lies in my power," said DeMonte, in an undertone to Adele.

"I suppose you will have to leave very early in the morning to get a good start on your journey," remarked Lucette to Mr. Fielding.

"Yes, far too early for the ladies to rise. Our good nights must now be said," he answered.

"Good night, Massa Feelin," said Jute, whimpering. "Good night Massa Bert, I'se hope yo' both come home soon," said she backing toward the door, "'N, Massa, if yo' come across a coal mine in dem dar diggins, jist yo' recomember Jute—we be de same color—two ob a kind," she sobbingly cried. Then, shaking hands with all, she reluctantly passed from the room.

"Good night and pleasant dreams," said Lucette, extending her hand to DeMonte.

"Pardon, Miss Westly, one who dares to dream of thee," murmured DeMonte, pressing her little dimpled hand to his lips.

"Such impertinence," declared Lucette to herself, quickly withdrawing her hand and turning away from his leering gaze.

"Remember my instructions," DeMonte cautiously whispered to Adele, who at that instant happened to stand near him.

"Good night, Bertie," softly said Lucette, gazing frankly into the lieutenant's handsome sad face.

"Good night and God bless you, and send you and Papa Fielding home safe."

"My darling," he whispered, bending low and kissing Lucette's hand fervently. Turning quickly to Mr. Fielding, Lucette leaned her head upon his shoulder, trying to stay the tears that came coursing down her cheek, and in a choking voice cried: "Oh, Papa Fielding, my heart is just breaking."

"Come, come, Lucette, you unnerve me. We are not going away forever. Cheer up, my pet, we shall be back before you have time to miss us. Eh, my boy," said he arresting the lieutenant's attention.

"Of course we will," assuringly replied the lieutenant, endeavoring to be cheerful. "Now, Adele, you must try and cheer Lucette up a bit."

"You may depend upon me, sir. A pleasant journey to you, Mr. Fielding," she graciously said, extending him her hand. Then archly,

looking at the lieutenant, said: "The time will seem long until we meet again."

"Oh, thanks. You are very kind," said he, bowing to Adele.

"Come, Lucette," as she parted the curtains of the arched doorway for Lucette to precede her. Lucette hesitated for an instant, then throwing her arms around Mr. Fielding's neck she embraced him. Bowing to the lieutenant and DeMonte, both of whom kissed their hand to her, she passed from their view, followed by Adele through the parted portiers.

"I had no idea Lucette would take our journey so much to heart," sorrowfully commented Mr. Fielding.

"Miss Lucette is certainly attached to you. Any man might envy you."

"I would lose my life for her," said Mr. Fielding, looking DeMonte full in the face.

"Any man might where she is concerned," returned DeMonte.

"By Jove, midnight! It is time to retire. We have only a few hours for rest before we will have to be on the wing," said the lieutenant, as the old Mission clock finished striking twelve. "By the way, do we stop over for a day at the Summit, father?"

"Yes, it will make us arrive one day later at the mine, but I must see *Chesterfield*."

"One day in advance of them," excitedly thought DeMonte to himself as he paid particular attention to the plan which Mr. Fielding had just announced.

"Come, 'Rod,' old chum, join us in a night-cap," invitingly cried the lieutenant, pouring out some brandy

"A safe trip, gentlemen," said DeMonte, tilting and then draining his glass. "Good night," he resumed abruptly.

"I'll follow suit, dad, and have you up at daybreak," said the lieutenant, affectionately laying his hand on his father's shoulder, then followed in the footsteps of DeMonte.

"How my heart aches tonight," sorrowfully said Mr. Fielding aloud. Directing his steps toward a small door he paused a moment before entering. Continuing, "Lucette, why have you unnerved me? Poor child, poor child." He opened the door and retired to an inner room to rest.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BLOW

It was a little past midnight as Leigh entered the sitting room. "Evidently all have retired," said he to himself. Crossing over to the table, he began a search which resulted in the finding of a bunch of keys which he had previously left there.

"Ah! Here are the keys, exactly where I left them. I don't think it will be possible for me to sleep the sleep of the just, so long as Roderick DeMonte is under this roof. I don't like him, and Leigh, old boy, your instinct was never wrong yet," he acknowledged to himself. "Ah!" he exclaimed aloud striking a listening attitude, as a footstep made audible by the crushing of the dry October leaves that fell on the garden path met his ear. He quickly turned off the light, parted the curtains and gazed out through the open window.

"A man crossing through the shrubberies. It is Roderick DeMonte. Where can he be going in that direction at this unseemly hour of the night? I'll find out," thought he.

Quickly suiting the action to his thought, he hastily left the room and went out into the night.

"Long past midnight, and still not inclined to sleep. My brain is on fire," exclaimed DeMonte aloud as he strolled through the Fielding grounds. "Little do they suspect that I hold an interest in the claim adjoining the Lucette Mine. I am over anxious to possess their water right. Now to obtain and then destroy the papers that are now in Mr. Fielding's possession. I have made up my mind the course to pursue. One man's word is as good as another's. A rich mine in my possession and then—to woo and win the fair Lucette. My gypsy love," he soliloquized, "I shall endeavor to see but once again. Shall I be received with kisses or curses—either will be alike to me now, since I have learned to love Lucette." Then, with a mad fury rushing through his brain, he cried aloud: "I'd sink my soul in perdition for her sweet sake. She holds full power to make an angel or a demon of me, which—" "You are," said Larry Leigh, bravely confronting him.

"Stand back! Who are you?" returned DeMonte, startled as Leigh flashed a lantern

in his face. "You," cried DeMonte, recognizing Leigh, his face turning livid with suppressed rage. "What means this insult, wretch?"

"That you had better not utter your thoughts aloud. It's liable to give one the impression that you are plotting mischief," said Leigh, bestowing upon him a keen, penetrating look.

"Ha! Ha!" sneeringly laughed DeMonte. "Strange—a guest of Mr. Fielding's cannot amuse himself by indulging in a moonlight rehearsal of a favorite scene without being insulted by a mere hireling. Were Mr. Fielding to know of this, menial, your position would be at stake."

"And you dare not tell him. Your *honor* would be at stake," he gallantly returned.

"Could he have overheard all?" thought DeMonte, biting his bloodless lips. Then he made an effort to pass Leigh, and, thwarted in this, he venomously cried: "Enough, dog, allow me to pass. You shall suffer for this," he resumed, threateningly.

"Not until you hear what I have to say. Remember, you are a guest here and have been treated courteously, but when you underhandedly aspire for the love of Miss

Westly, you are acting the part of a traitor. You are trying to rob your benefactor, Lieutenant Fielding, of a jewel (Lucette Westly), who is as far above you as the stars are the earth."

"*You* dare accuse me of being a traitor to one of this household," hotly retored DeMonte, making a vicious move toward Leigh. "Scoundrel! Take back your words," he cried in a furious manner.

"Never," answered Leigh, defiantly.

"Liar! Hireling!" cried DeMonte, pale with rage as his uplifted heavy cane was about to descend on Leigh's head.

"Villain—take that," cried Leigh, as he dashed the cane from DeMonte's hand and struck him a severe blow with his fist which felled him to the ground.

CHAPTER XVI.

ESPERANZA'S MOUNTAIN HUT

The winter's storm raged through the rugged canyon. The frequent peals of thunder seemed to split the surrounding mountains asunder, and the lightning which flashed incessantly illuminated the destruction of the tempest's mad fury. The storm abated for a moment as the pale tear-stained face of a woman peered anxiously from the window of a rough hut which was situated in the heart of the canyon. Again and again, anxiously was the face pressed against the pane of glass only to be driven back by the wild hurricane in its renewed fury—driven back—to contemplate with anguish the misery that was apparent in the room of that roughly furnished hut.

Kneeling beside a pallet, which was covered with some dry skins, crouched the form of the sad, pale-faced woman, bowed in grief. Suddenly raising her head, she bent over the pallet and lightly kissed the brow of a slumbering child. "Sleep, sweet babe," she gently murmured, gazing with soulful intensity at

the child. "Sleep the blessed sleep that shall prove a balm for thy malady."

"What a terrible storm," she cried, shuddering as a flash of lightning and a crash of thunder rent the air. "Alas! My poor ailing darling," she mournfully cried, as the child awoke and piteously moaned. "Thou art nigh unto death, my babe."

"Oh, Roderick, father of my child, why doth thou linger? Oh, my babe, thou must not die," she frantically cried, as she bent over the little one caressingly. "Thou must not die, thou must live," she cried pathetically. "Live to kiss thy father's lips; to smile upon his face; to receive his blessing. Howl ye winds," she cried fearlessly, as the hut creaked and rocked with the velocity of the tempest's fury. "Doth thou wail tidings of my babe's death?" A loud peal of thunder with a diabolical crash seemed to answer. "That unearthly sound," she cried, clutching the scant shawl that meagerly covered her shoulders. "Is it a warning?" she tremblingly cried. "Hark! The coyotes. 'Tis their mournful wail, driven wild by cold and hunger. Do they scent death? No, my babe," she wildly cried, "naught shall tear thee from thy mother's breast," she frantically knelt beside

the sick child and buried her head in her hands.

She was suddenly aroused by a loud knock at the door and a voice cried out: "Let me in! Let me in!"

"Some one in distress," she cried excitedly, as she proceeded to unbar the door.

"Roderick! Thou?" she cried, overwhelmed with surprise, as DeMonte entered the hut covered with drifting snow. "My love, my life! Roderick, welcome to the gypsy's hut." she pathetically cried, endeavoring to embrace him.

"I came nigh losing my way," said he in a hoarse voice, frowning. And, casting his wet coat aside, "I called out several times," resumed he, seating himself on a rude bench. "'Twas thy cry I heard in the distance, Roderick, dearest," she caressingly said, as she knelt down by his side. "Thou art welcome home," she resumed, her large, luminous eyes burning with love, looking upon his stern, cold face. "How lonely I have been——"

"Come! Come, Esperanza," he said, ill at ease. "I am nearly frozen and completely famished." Rising quickly, she imparted a kiss on his cheek.

"How selfish I am, dearest," she said,

crossing to the cupboard, procuring and then arranging some viands on the table. "Forgive me. I forgot everything, enraptured by thy presence. Thou art hungry—thou shalt eat. Thou are cold—there is the warm fire," she happily said, picking up and throwing in an extra log.

"How unprepared she will be to receive the blow," thought DeMonte, as he silently gazed upon her as she was trying to fan the dying flame.

"Thy supper I have prepared, love," she eagerly said, crossing over to the table. "Now eat of it," she pleasantly resumed, nodding her head and lifting up his drenched coat, she affectionately kissed it before she hung it up to dry.

"The food chokes me," said DeMonte doggedly, after he had partaken of a couple of mouthfuls, then taking a small flask from his pocket, he said, "*This* is what fires one's brain." He placed the flask to his lips, drained it and then threw it heavily upon the table, where it fell with a crash.

"Why, Roderick, doth thou act so strange?" anxiously questioned Esperanza, rushing quickly to his side. Then kneeling down, her pale face uplifted to his in surprise, she placed

her arms lovingly about his neck, murmuring, "Art thou troubled, Roderick?"

"Troubled," he replied, rising and casting her ruthlessly aside. "Yes, better know the truth at once, Esperanza," he said, looking at her defiantly, "we must part."

"No! No!" she wildly cried, desperately clinging to him and tearfully pleading. "Unsay those cruel, cruel words."

"Enough," he replied sternly, unclasping her arms and casting her aside. "Understand—it must be forever."

"Forever? We part forever?" repeated Esperanza, in a dazed, bewildered tone. "Roderick," she cried imploringly, rushing to his side and clasping his hand. "My love, my life, we cannot part! Cruel words—I do but dream. Thou can'st not mean it, mine own," she pathetically pleaded, covering her face with her hands and sobbing bitterly.

"Listen, woman," cried DeMonte, grasping her roughly by the arm. "You do not dream. Neither do I jest. I repeat again," said he, as he loosened her grasp, and flung her aside, "what your blind love for me fails to see, I have ceased to care for you,"

said he coolly, lighting a cigarette, "and *have* for *sometime* past."

"Oh, Roderick," she shrieked wildly. "Such words from thee—who hath sworn to love me. They pierce like a stiletto sent to my heart. Doth thou love another? Maybe—one who would'st not consent to become thy slave as I have been," she bitterly cried, sinking with sheer exhaustion into a chair, she sobbingly continued, "Now thy wish is to cast me aside."

"Be thankful I deign to inform you of it at all. This wild love," said he, striking the table a furious blow, "*must cease.*"

"Cease! Cease!" breathlessly panted Esperanza, as she slowly arose, trembling visibly, her gazelle-like eyes dimmed with unrestrained tears. "Cease—yes, when my lips refuse to utter my love; when my heart that bounded at thy footstep beats no longer; when mine eyes, which behold thy being are closed forever; when my form which thou hast robbed of its honor, be lifeless and cold—then—and only then—will my love cease."

"Esperanza, listen to reason. Nearly all women overestimate man's affection. When guilty of this error, it seldom if ever termin-

ates well. Women should believe about one-tenth of man's proffered affection. One-hundredth part of aught he may swear. Women are to be pitied, who, fully believing in man's love, yield their honor readily. Seldom if ever we care to make such women our wives. I hope, Esperanza, you may now understand why it becomes necessary for us to part."

"Roderick, for heaven's sake spare me," she imploringly cried, sinking on her knees beside the pallet. "Spare me," she pleaded, "If not your wife I am the mother of your child." Pulling back the curtain that surrounded the pallet, she revealed to his gaze the unconscious form of the ailing child.

"Perdition! The child lives—my child?" he cried in horror.

"Dare you doubt it?" exultingly asked the gypsy, as she raised the child's bare arm on which a long red mark was plainly visible. "This arm bears the *proof* of the treachery practiced upon the mother," she said, giving him a keen, flashing look.

"Woman, what do you mean to infer?"

Without immediately answering DeMonte, she slowly rolled up the sleeve of her blouse and exhibited her arm on which was a deep

red scar. "This arm," she continued, "received the thrust of the knife which was intended to pierce the heart of the mother and unborn babe. Better had the assassin's cowardly blow proved fatal. It would have saved my heart from the torture now of knowing that I have loved—yes—loved in vain."

"Evidently you accuse me of having tried to assassinate you," he sneeringly remarked.

"Dare you deny it?" she asked undaunted.

"Would that I had killed her," he said under his breath. Then with a leer on his swarthy face, he ventured to remark, "I deny or affirm nothing. Your gypsy propensities of reading the past and future should save you from asking such foolish questions, but I swear Esperanza——"

"Hold," she cried, interrupting him. "Perjure your soul no more. Ah, yes," a gleam of cunning flashing from her eyes, she resumed. "Women should believe one-tenth of man's proffered affection. One-hundredth part of aught he may swear. See, I have learned your lesson readily, never to be forgotten. Oh, my babe," she frantically cried, as the child on the pallet gave a slight moan, "How can'st I relieve thy suffering? Thou

art chilled. Thou art growing cold. Thine eyes," she wildly cried, raising the child's head lovingly and clasping it to her breast. "How they stare! How glassy! Be merciful, Roderick," she passionately pleaded. "Look! look once upon the face of thy child e're its eyes are closed in death."

"You request an assassin to gaze upon your innocent child?" he sneeringly asked.

"Have pity," she shrieked, as the little inanimate form gasped. "Too late! Too late! Death hast claimed thee, mine own," she pathetically cried, wringing her hands, and with a wild burst of agonized grief, she fell prostrate over the lifeless child.

"The child dead?" gasped DeMonte, making a feeble attempt to look at it. "No, I cannot," said he, turning away. "That face would haunt me forever." Taking his coat, and then walking to the door, he said in a hoarse voice: "Esperanza, I go, cursing myself and you alike. Farewell forever." He opened the door of the hut and rushed out into the blinding storm.

Raising her head wearily Esperanza in a dazed voice pitifully called: "Roderick, Roderick! Gone! Oh, God, I have been deserted by father and child. What have I to live for

now? Why not end this misery at once," she pantingly cried, grasping a stiletto from her belt. Gazing at the lifeless little form she shuddered, and, letting the stiletto drop from her hand, in an agonized voice cried: "No. I must not. I must live," a dangerous light creeping into her magnetic eyes. "Live, to seek that soothing balm so cooling to the gypsy's blood—REVENGE. "Here (she cried kneeling by the side of the pallet) over the dead body of my child, I swear it." Rising, she continued wrathfully. "Go, Roderick De-Monte, but we shall meet again. Vengeance shall fall as unrelentingly upon thy head as the storm now is bursting upon the mountains. Let the tempest roar," she cried, as a peal of thunder vibrated through the mountain canyon. "Howl, ye winds. Louder, louder!" she excitedly cried, her eyes flashing and a feverish glow now o'erspreading her dusky face. "Proclaim my vengeance and forget not in thy mad fury to chant a requiem for my babe." With a heart-rending sob she fell, grief stricken, beside the body of her child.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MURDER

The afternoon's sun was bravely struggling to lavish its last sickly rays o'er the magnificent crests and valleys of the glorious Sierras. The clouds were gathering and the chill in the air penetrated keenly through the thick coat which Mr. Fielding had buttoned tightly around himself as he descended a mountain trail which led to a cabin situated in close proximity to the Lucette Mine. Lieutenant Fielding (his son) was walking a short distance behind carrying two light grips. As the lieutenant caught up with him, Mr. Fielding joyously sang out: "Well, Bert, here we are at last."

"It is strange that Girrade failed to meet us," replied the lieutenant. "I'm sure he'll lose no time, though, in following our footsteps."

"Very likely. Now for the cabin," said Mr. Fielding, trying to open the door. "I feel quite fatigued. Tramping over a rough mountain trail at my time of life does not agree with me."

"That's so, dad," answered the lieutenant, following his father into the cabin. "This old shelter has held an occupant very recently," said he, gazing curiously around. "Probably Girrade himself. I'm hungry," said the lieutenant, taking a bottle from off the table. "A bonanza—brandy sure," said he smelling its contents. "Glance at the table, dad," said he, drawing Mr. Fielding's attention to the well-spread table. "Cold venison, beans and biscuits. Girrade evidently expected us. Sit down, father, the table looks tempting to two hungry travelers. Doesn't it?"

"Yes, indeed. This trip has sharpened my appetite," said Mr. Fielding, as he sat down and filled his glass from the bottle of brandy.

"Well, I wish it could sharpen this knife," said the lieutenant, trying to cut a piece of venison. "Here, Jute."

"Ah, my boy, I see your thoughts are of home," said Mr. Fielding, sighing.

"You've hit the mark, dad. I just wonder how Lucette is getting along?"

"Grieving herself to death by imagining us devoured by wild beasts."

"Foolish child," said the lieutenant, tilting back in his chair. "As I live," he exclaimed, "someone must have shot a bear recently."

Then leaving the table he walked over and examined a skin that was hanging on the wall to dry. "I wonder who's the lucky huntsman?"

"Girrade boasts of being a fine shot. Perhaps it was he," replied Mr. Fielding, yawning.

"Great boy, I would like to join him on one of his hunting expeditions."

"Look! There stands a rifle and a shotgun," said Mr. Fielding, pointing to one corner of the cabin.

"Let's see," said the lieutenant, examining the gun. "The shotgun is loaded. Say, dad, I noticed a fine bevy of quail down the road. I'm going out to try my skill for an hour or so, that is, if you don't object to being left alone, father. Now, to scare up ammunition. Ah, here is some," joyfully said he, as he discovered a box of loaded shells on a small shelf situated above the table. "Well, I'm off, dad," said he, as he shouldered his gun. Pausing at the door, he continued: "I'll soon return."

"Enjoy your sport," said Mr. Fielding, watching him depart. "Girrade is likely to arrive here at any moment. Keep well upon the trail. Good luck to you, my boy,"

he said, as the lieutenant ran up the mountain trail. "Patience, but this tramp has tired me out. I'll throw myself down and take a short nap during Bert's absence. In case of an intrusion I'll bolt the door," thought Mr. Fielding. "Now, then," said he, yawning, "for a nap." Throwing himself down upon the rude cot, he soon fell asleep.

Scarcely had the door closed upon Mr. Fielding when Roderick DeMonte stealthy came from behind a large boulder. Gazing up the trail in the direction Lieutenant Fielding had taken, he watched intently the lieutenant's receding form—watched it until it appeared indistinct in the distance.

"Alone! Alone at last," he exultingly exclaimed. "Now is my time to secure the papers," he said to himself, cautiously trying the door. "Locked," he muttered, as the door did not yield to his strenuous efforts. "Shall I be foiled?" Then holding his ear closely to the keyhole, he listened breathlessly to the deep breathing within. "He sleeps. I'll try the window." Cautiously walking around the cabin he easily opened the window, crawled in and crept softly toward the sleeping man, listening occasionally to make sure that his sleep was profound, he stooped

and quickly opened a grip that he perceived lying on the floor. Examining it quickly, he muttered disgustedly, "Nothing there, except *this*," picking up a stiletto. At that instant the sleeping man gave a slight moan. Grasping the hilt of the newly found stiletto in his hand, he peered intently at the sleeping victim. "Another move and I'll drive this to your heart." Reassuring himself that Mr. Fielding was in a deep stupor, he bent down again and continued his search in the second grip that happened to be lying wide open. His dark eagle eye alighted on a small pistol that was lying in full view. Picking it up and examining it, he held it toward the dying light and read the engraved name upon it—LIEUTENANT A. FIELDING. "My friend, you are doomed," said he, putting the pistol in his back pocket. The papers I seek may be concealed here," thought he, stooping over Mr. Fielding's body. His wicked gaze seemed to disturb the sleep of the helpless man, for he restlessly murmured, "MY SON, GOD BLESS YOU." DeMonte, observing Mr. Fielding's restless slumber, quickly concealed his face with his black silk muffler, as Mr. Fielding opened his eyes. "Who are you? What do you want?" exclaimed the

sleep-dazed man. "Your papers, quick," demanded DeMonte, endeavoring to disguise his voice.

"Never," cried Mr. Fielding, suddenly awakened. Instantly the two men clinched, and in the fierce struggle between them, DeMonte accidentally dropped the stiletto, and in his endeavor to regain it, the impromptu mask, which had concealed his face, became displaced, then in an accent of surprised horror, Mr. Fielding, recognizing DeMonte, cried out, "YOU?"

DeMonte uttered not a word, but instantly drawing the lieutenant's pistol from his pocket, took aim and fired.

"MURDER—MUR—" cried Mr. Fielding reeling, he fell prone upon the floor.

DeMonte, gazing at his victim lying at his feet, instantly began a search of the lifeless form of Mr. Fielding. "Now, for the papers. Then to escape," said he anxiously. "Luck favors me. Here they are." Quickly obtaining some papers from the body of Mr. Fielding, he agitatedly transferred them into his own pocket. "*This* little toy, removing the pistol from his pocket, "I shall throw by the wayside, where, if found, can be brought in evidence against Lieutenant

Fielding." Casting a look at the prostrate form, he shuddered as he unbolted the door. Rushing out, pistol in hand, he confronted Lieutenant Fielding, who was about to enter the cabin.

"Roderick!" cried the lieutenant, starting back amazed. You here? What means this agitation?" excitedly questioned the lieutenant raising his gun. "It means," replied DeMonte wildly rushing upon the lieutenant and knocking the gun from his hands. "It means dog—you die, rather than thwart my plans." he then, with an angry curse sent a bullet through the shoulder of the gallant lieutenant. "Father! Help! Help!" gasped the lieutenant, then all was still, as his body, with a heavy thud, fell to the ground.

"DEAD AND DOOMED," soliloquized DeMonte, as he knelt beside the apparently lifeless body. "Both are removed from my path forever. This little piece of mechanism," thought he, placing the pistol at the lieutenant's side, shall shield me from detection. Now, to remove the shotgun," he said, as he quickly placed it inside the cabin, "and the coyotes may feast upon these," as he picked up the string of quail which the lieutenant had shot and threw them down

the gulch. "The evidence of the lieutenant's guilt is *there*," said he, pointing to the revolver, "and dead men's lips are sealed forever."

"Now, I'll away and banish this accursed tragedy from my mind, ere I again seek Lucette's presence. Farewell, my noble comrade," he mockingly said. "You had not the honor of falling on the battlefield, but by my hand—I, that ere this—thirsted for your life. You were never born to be drowned, my friend. A miracle alone once saved you, in the guise of a fisherman. I received the credit of *saving your life then*. I don't want the credit of *taking it now*. You came upon me one moment too soon," mused he, walking toward the trail. Running deftly up the path, he looked back, saying, "it was your fate—farewell." He then disappeared from view.

"Villian! Villian beware," cried Esperanza, the gypsy, gazing after DeMonte as she emerged from behind a tall pine tree. "Did'st thou think that thy dastardly deed was unwitnessed? Go! Revel—revel in thy belief. Vengeance will burst upon thy head whilst thou art sleeping, for the gypsy, like the snake that charms the bird, abides the time

for its destruction. Then kneeling at the lieutenant's side, she scanned his face intently. "Who art thou, man, on whom De-Monte hath wreaked his vengeance? Is life extinct?" she said, raising his head. "What is this?" she exclaimed aloud, picking up a miniature and opening it—a miniature that had evidently fallen from his pocket. "That face. 'Tis she—she who hath come between my love and me. She must be the cause of enmity between Roderick DeMonte and his victim. I'll baffle his plans," she wildly cried. "If there be life, I will save this man, and none but my faithful 'Wah-Ha' (the Indian), shall know of his existence."

She lightly ran up the mountain path and signaled with her hands, which summoned instantly a stalwart, dusky Indian, whom she motioned to help render assistance to the dying man. The last lurid rays of the setting sun pictured Esperanza and her faithful mute bearing to safety the human freight up the mountain side.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DISCOVERED WEAPON

"It looks as if it were clouding up for a storm," said Claude Girrade, the overseer of the Lucette Mine, who was coming down the trail in the approaching darkness. "I thought we would be able to reach camp long before dusk."

"I'se be glad, Massa Girrade, we be heah. I's tramped nuff fo' one day," replied Criss, Girrade's colored companion, as he laid down a large heavy grip with a sigh.

"The cabin appears to be in total darkness. Can it be possible that Mr. Fielding and his son have mistaken the trail?"

"Gess not, massa. Dey maybe 'sleep in de cabin," reassuringly replied Criss.

"Strike a light, Criss, I feel worried in regard to my friends. If I had received their telegram in time, I would have personally conducted them hither," he said entering the cabin.

"Confoun' dem matches," said Criss, impatiently striking two or three without effect. "Dey be reg'lar scantlins."

"Bring me a light, quick," called Girrade in a perplexed tone from within the cabin. "What the deuce have I stepped into," he exclaimed. Great heavens! What is this?" he cried, stricken with horror, as Criss flashed the lantern in the cabin door. "My God! Mr. Fielding! Here! Dead!"

"Oh, Lordy deliber us. Dis am terrible, terrible!" cried Criss, rolling up his eyes and trembling like a water-soaked dog.

"Dead, lifeless and cold," pronounced Girrade, after hastily examining the murdered man. "Where can Lieutenant Fielding be?" he anxiously inquired. "There has been a strange tragedy enacted here. Now, to fathom this mystery."

"Oh, Massa, I'se tremblin' like a fellar dat hab got de ague."

"Come, come, brace up. Let us investigate this affair," said Girrade, lighting another lantern. Then he immediately stepped out of the cabin followed by Criss.

"Look! Look, Massa, Here am a pool of blood," excitedly cried Criss, pointing upon the ground outside of the cabin.

"Strange, no trace of it any place else," returned Girrade, as he cast the rays of the

lantern around. "Ah," he excitedly exclaimed, discovering the lieutenant's pistol on the ground. "A clue," perhaps, said he, picking up the pistol and examining it closely. He started violently as he read the engraved name of Lieutenant Fielding upon the handle. "His son's revolver," he ejaculated, "and two chambers empty. Could he have committed this outrageous deed and fled? If so—let him be brought to justice. Lieutenant Fielding evidently has murdered HIS OWN FATHER."

CHAPTER XIX.

SIX WEEKS LATER

The curtains in the spacious living room of the Fielding home were drawn closely. A cheerful fire burned brightly in the old Dutch grate. The reading lamp, which stood on the old massive mahogany table, with its dark green shade, cast a subdued light on the comfortable furnishings of the room.

Seated beside the open fireplace sat Lucette, robed in a dress of deep mourning. Her shapely golden head rested on her dimpled arm as she watched the ruddy flames—profoundly thinking.

“How dreary life seems to me now! Oh, father, why were you destined to take that perilous journey which has brought such desolation upon our home? Evil, indeed, has overtaken us. It was the gypsy’s prophecy,” she mournfully thought, bowing her head in grief.

“Come, child, you must overcome this morbidness,” said Adele, who, upon opening the door and entering the room, discovered Lucette in the above described attitude.

"Adele, you know not what you ask. This suspense is killing me," she said tearfully, rising. "Killing me," she repeated, wringing her hands in despair. "It is fully six weeks since we received tidings of this dreadful tragedy, and the assassin——"

"Lieutenant Fielding," interrupted Adele. "Can you believe the verdict?" she asked with marked emphasis.

"No! No!" Lucette excitedly cried, her azure eyes flashing and her pale face drawn. "It is that thought which drives me to distraction. My heart tells me that Lieutenant Fielding is innocent of the crime he is accused of, but as time passes away and no tidings of him dead or alive is received to prove his innocence, I am on the verge of despair. Yet rest assured the guilty shall not go unpunished."

"But who is the guilty one?" asked Adele, thoughtfully.

"I cannot say," returned Lucette. "Papa Fielding had no enemies. Robbery was not the cause of the crime, as his wallet was found undisturbed on his person."

"Girrade, during the inquest," remarked Adele, "referred to certain papers supposed

to be on Mr. Fielding's person, previous to his death, as a motive for the murder."

"The papers proving the water right to the mine?—they were found untouched in his pocket," returned Lucette.

"Then, suspicion rests alone on Lieutenant Fielding," said Adele in a slow, sorrowful, measured tone.

"Patience, Adele. Time, the healing balm, the relentless avenger, will tell," said Lucette with a deep drawn sob.

"Missy Lucette," called Jute, as she opened the door and dashed unceremoniously into the living room. She was ridiculously attired in a black mull dress which she made conspicuous by the adornment of a cherry colored sash which was tied in a gorgeous bow at the back of her dress. A cherry ribbon adorned her hair. In her hand she held a large bouquet.

"Heah be some posies wid de compliments ob de gen'man on de ticket," she said as she laid the bouquet on the table.

Adele, gazing at Jute in utter astonishment, quickly asked: "What are you made up for, Jute?"

"The idea of you wearing such bright colored ribbons so soon? Do you forget we

are in deep mourning, Jute?" reproachfully questioned Lucette.

"Morning or ebenin', it all be de same in dis house now. Eberyting be dark and dreary. I'se jist put on dis cherry bow to liven de folks up a bit," said Jute, poutingly.

"Don't do it again. It displeases me very much. Run along now and remove those ribbons immediately," said Lucette, seriously.

Jute, turning to go, said half aloud, "Ma cherry bow 'n Missy Lucette's bouquet, bof got a cold 'ception."

"These roses are exquisite," remarked Adele, picking up the roses and arranging them gracefully in a vase on the table.

Lucette, in an absent minded way, replied: "Oh, yes, rather." Then, carelessly glancing at the card that was attached to the bouquet, she tossed it aside indifferently, and with a tinge of annoyance in her voice said: "Why does that man pester me with his attentions?"

"Nothing seems to interest you now," remarked Adele, looking up meekly.

"You are right, Adele," quickly answered Lucette, crossing the room. Opening the window and looking out now into the starry night, she continued, as she inhaled a breath

of the clear, crisp air: "Especially Roderick DeMonte's attentions and gifts."

"Lucette, you must admit that he has treated you very kindly during your recent bereavement, and is doing all in his power to fathom the mystery. Being Lieutenant Fielding's dearest friend, you should try and show him a little consideration, Lucette."

"Should Roderick DeMonte be able to clear Lieutenant Fielding's name of this stigma, much as I repulse him, willingly would I give him my everlasting gratitude."

"Well, Lucette," said Adele, gently caressing her, "you being alone in the world now, you should have some one in the world to protect you. Roderick DeMonte loves you desperately and he will not leave a stone unturned to help unravel this mystery. Surely you should repay him with a little more than gratitude—love—say."

"Love?" indignantly answered Lucette. "The word to me is mockery. Ask me not to love in this world again. Gratitude I may give. Love—never," she said resigned.

"If Roderick DeMonte calls this evening, you will at any rate promise to receive him kindly," Adele asked, patronizingly.

"I will try," answered Lucette, coldly.

"Come, Lucette, join me in a short walk.

The evening air is crisp and will revive your spirits and do you good."

"Very well," said Lucette, as she reluctantly followed Adele.

A good half hour had hardly elapsed, when Jute ushered Roderick DeMonte into the living room. Placing a chair at his disposal, she relieved him of his overcoat and hat. He was faultlessly attired in evening dress. "So your mistress is at home?" asked he smilingly of Jute, as he slowly drew off his glove.

"Yes, sah, Missy Lucette be at home. Please be seated, I'se gwyne to call her 'mediately." Jute then went in search of Lucette.

"So," soliloquized DeMonte, seating himself, "the fair Lucette condescends to receive me ere I depart. What a lucky individual you are, DeMonte! Ah, Lucette is subdued now by believing that her lover is the assassin of his father. Luckily for me that I succeeded in robbing Mr. Fielding, *not* of papers relative to the mine as I intended, but of some worthless papers he happened to have in his possession. Thus have the detectives been foiled of a clue. Why the body of Lieutenant Fielding, if dead, has not been found, is a mystery to me. No matter. Dead he is harmless, and were he alive he would have proclaimed his innocence before now."

CHAPTER XX.

THE PROMISE

Lucette was startled visibly on beholding DeMonte upon her entrance into the room where he was anxiously waiting for her.

DeMonte, with a profound bow, offered Lucette his hand, saying, "My dear Miss Westly."

"Pray be seated, Mr. DeMonte," she said coldly, motioning toward a chair. "Jute informed me that you were here and desired to see me. There is no word as yet—no tidings—of Lieutenant Fielding?" she eagerly asked, as she sank down in a large easy chair.

"None, poor fellow, dead or alive," answered DeMonte, solemnly shaking his head. His eyes rested upon the floor. He dare not look Lucette in the face.

"But his name," cried Lucette excitedly. "This stigma must be removed. You know, Roderick DeMonte, that he never committed that deed," said she, looking him searchingly in the face.

"I believe my friend capable of every virtue. I shall endeavor to do my utmost to clear his name if dead and bring the true

assassin to justice. For my reward I ask to lay my heart's devotion at thy feet."

"Roderick DeMonte, this subject is very painful to me in my early grief. If you can accept my gratitude——"

"Yes, Lucette," interrupted DeMonte, "Your faintest smile makes me the happiest of men. As your eternal slave I now kneel at your feet, craving that some day you will return my passionate love. That I may call you my wife."

"Roderick DeMonte, we may just as well come to an understanding once and forever. Your wife? Never can I bestow one atom of love upon you. My respect and gratitude is all you can expect," she said, sternly.

"Lucette," cried DeMonte pleadingly, "Unsay those words. Give me hope. Let me love thee. When it is proven that I have earned my reward by bringing the assassin to justice—grant me thy hand for my friend's sake—promise me." Lucette, in a bewildered voice hardly audible, hesitatingly stammered, "I—I—"

"Promise," interrupted DeMonte. "Heaven bless you. I go now, Lucette, enraptured in the anticipation of calling you the sweetest name on earth—wife." Quickly catching her hand, he kissed it fervently and without another word

donned his hat and overcoat and silently went out into the chilly night.

Lucette remained dumbfounded, dazed for the moment. The blood had receded from her face, leaving it deathly pale. Her eyes stared vacantly at the now closed door, through which DeMonte had passed. Madly clasping her hands together, she wildly exclaimed aloud, as the thought flashed through her brain: "What have I promised? Heavens! To become that man's wife. His wife! My very soul revolts," she excitedly uttered, clutching the arm of the chair violently for support, as she almost fell to the floor. "I a' hor him," she continued. "Oh, Bertie, forgive me! Forgive me!" she sobbed out in her wild despair. "Your sake alone demands this sacrifice," she tearfully uttered, bowing her head.

"In tears, Lucette?" asked Adele, entering the room. "I'm so sorry to see you so depressed. Why? What is the matter?"

Lucette arose hastily, wringing her hands and walking up and down. She cried out in an agonized voice: "Adele, I am almost distracted. What have I promised? What have I done?"

"Nothing unreasonable, nothing unpardonable, I hope," answered Adele, somewhat surprised.

"Listen!" Lucette replied in an agitated voice. Then, clutching Adele by the arm, she stared into her face and continued. "I have promised to become Roderick DeMonte's wife." At that instant the heavy curtains parted and Larry Leigh stood as if rooted to the spot as he exclaimed with horror: "LUCETTE WESTLY, ARE YOU MAD?"

Lucette and Adele started visibly as the hoarse voice reached them. Lucette turned deathly pale as she confronted Leigh, and Adele sarcastically asked: "What means this intrusion, sir? You forget——"

"Everything," said Leigh, "where Lucette's happiness and honor are concerned. Should you," said he, turning to Lucette, "deem this an intrusion I apologize. I came to seek you expecting to find you alone. Hearing voices I was about to retrace my steps when I was riveted to the spot by your announcement."

"But your remark," interrupted Adele.

"If I were dying I would still find strength to utter the words that would prohibit Lucette from becoming that man's—Roderick DeMonte's wife. I will offer an explanation," said he, glancing at Lucette, "when we are alone."

"Excuse me, Lucette," sneeringly said Adele "I shall not encroach upon valuable time which

must be devoted to the satisfactory explanation of an uncalled for remark made by an interfering individual. With your kind permission I beg to withdraw." Then, mockingly bowing, she left the room.

"Well, Leigh, what have you to say?" asked Lucette in a trembling voice, after Adele had taken her departure.

"The night previous to Mr. Fielding's leaving home he intrusted you to my care. Therefore I feel it my duty to snatch you from the precipice on which you stand, by thinking for a moment of bestowing your hand on Roderick DeMonte."

"Do you know anything detrimental to his character?"

"He is not to be trusted," bluntly said Leigh. "I cannot conceive how you have brought yourself to make such a promise when Lieutenant Fielding held, I thought, a place in your affections," continued he, in a piqued voice.

"Ah, Leigh, my promise was made on conditions that Roderick DeMonte would clear the stigma from Lieutenant Fielding's name and bring the true assassin to justice. I do not love DeMonte," she said, with a look of hatred passing over her face. "The love of my heart was given to him—for whom I now make

this sacrifice—to establish his innocence,” she bitterly rejoined.

“Bless you,” said Leigh joyfully. “You have relieved my heart by proclaiming your love for that gallant boy.” “Are you satisfied now, Leigh?” she gently inquired.

“Not until you withdraw your promise. He’ll not bring the true culprit to justice. I swear it,” he vehemently cried.

“That is a strong assertion. Be more explicit,” remarked Lucette.

“Recall your promise. I shall fathom this mystery without you having to sacrifice yourself by becoming that man’s wife.”

“You can do this and save me from a hateful betrothal?” eagerly asked Lucette.

“Yes; rest assured I will,” returned Leigh, “but I must have your help. Jute and you must be ready to accompany me three days hence on a journey to the Lucette Mine. Follow my instructions and we shall avenge the murder of Mr. Fielding and vindicate the name of Lieutenant Fielding.”

“Is not this a sudden determination, Leigh?” asked Lucette.

“No,” he answered, shortly. “My suspicions have been aroused for some time in regard to the gentleman in question. I must secure help

from only those whom I can trust, in order to foil the true murderer."

"Are you sure you are on the right track, Leigh?" anxiously inquired Lucette.

"Positive. One request I ask. Adele must not know of our intended destination."

"Leave that to me quietly," assented Lucette. The sudden drawn portieres revealed Jute, who yawningly approached, carrying a note in her hand.

"'Scuse me, Missy," she languidly said. "I'se thought Missy Adele was heah. Dis chile be tole to 'liver dis 'pistol"—yawning stupidly.

"Bang! Bang! Look out for it, Jute, it might go off," teasingly said Leigh.

"Who gave you this epistle, Jute?" asked Lucette, in surprise.

"Massa DeMonte," answered Jute, as she endeavored to suppress another yawn.

"Please don't attempt to open that rosebud mouth of yours so wide, Jute. It rather spoils your personal beauty." In reply Jute gave Leigh a withering look and saucily shrugged her shoulders.

"Strange DeMonte takes leave of Adele in this singular fashion," remarked she, glancing at the address on the note, "and at this late

hour," she continued. Turning to Jute, Lucette said: "You will have to seek Adele elsewhere, my child."

"All rite, Missy," she answered, still yawning and with a slow gait she left the room.

"Now, Miss Lucette, it is perfectly understood that you and Jute accompany me, three days hence."

"Yes. You may depend upon me without fail. I'll now bid you good night, Leigh."

"Good night," he pleasantly answered, as Lucette opened the door that led out of the room.

"Left alone," Leigh thought: "Before I retire I'll enjoy a cigar and think well over my coming plans." Lighting a cigar which he took from his pocket, he leisurely strolled over to the large bay window, where he concealed himself behind the old-fashioned damask curtains.

"Deserted," exclaimed Adele, entering the room and cautiously looking about. "I wonder what could have induced Roderick DeMonte's sudden departure? Evidently there must be something on his mind." The door, which Adele happened to leave ajar, was immediately darkened by the entrance of the little domestic, Jute, crying: "Oh, Missy Adele, I'se so tired. I'se jist chased de 'hole house all ober

fo' yo,' Missy, to gib yo' dis," she said, offering the note to Adele.

Adele quickly grasped the note and hurriedly opening it, she read the following:

"Adele, when all have retired, meet me in the library. Give signal. Important.

"DeMONTE."

Knitting her brow and then looking quickly up she perceived Jute still standing waiting. "Go on. Get to bed. You look weary," commanded Adele, as Jute willingly scooted.

"I wonder," thought Adele, unconsciously dropping DeMonte's note on the table, "what he wants of me now? I am getting so tired of being compelled to do Roderick DeMonte's bidding. What is there to be gained now—since Lieutenant Fielding is no more? I'll *grant* him this interview and give him to understand that I shall not be his accomplice any longer. It is now close on to eleven o'clock," said she, glancing at the time. "All have retired, so I will venture to give the signal." Lowering the lamp, she quickly darted from the room.

Leigh suddenly emerged from behind the heavy curtains. "More mystery," thought he, as he lightly advanced toward the table. "What's this," said he aloud, picking up the note which Adele had unconsciously dropped. He quickly scanned its contents. "So, my

pretty pair," he declared aloud, "there seems to be a conspiracy on hand. I think I shall remain just where I was and await further developments." Leigh had scarcely concealed himself behind the heavily curtained window before Adele returned to the room. Looking anxiously about, she hastened to a side window that overlooked the garden. Opening the window quietly she then waved her hand, after which she walked over to the table. Turning up the light she discovered the note. Quickly picking it up, she hid it in the folds of her dress. A look of annoyance crossed her brow as she thought: "How stupid of me to have been so careless." A low knock at the door startled her. She quickly opened the door and confronted DeMonte.

"Alone?" Adele, he inquired, looking about.

"Quite, be seated. We are not likely to be disturbed," Adele answered, giving him an inquiring look.

"Lucette thinks I have taken my departure ere this, but I could not leave without an interview with you. Lucette has accepted me as her betrothed. No doubt you are surprised," said he, as he noticed her involuntary start. Drawing out a silk handkerchief from his pocket, he unconsciously dropped a small addressed card.

Looking keenly at Adele he wondered what effect his announcement had made upon her.

"Then I am at liberty to end all these clandestine meetings," she rigidly remarked.

"Well, yes," he replied with a drawling accent. "I am sorry things did not turn out as well as we expected. As far as I am concerned I have nothing to regret, but the loss of my brave young friend, the lieutenant."

"While I—" returned Adele bitterly.

"Have suffered," interrupted DeMonte, "by loving and losing the lieutenant."

"Do you mean to infer that Lieutenant Fielding never cared for me?" asked Adele, a humiliating blush mantling her cheeks. "That you lured me on with false hope with the selfish motive of only benefiting yourself?" she asked, in an injured, indignant tone.

"Pray, don't get excited, dear girl, remember the old adage—'All's fair in love and war.'"

"So," she said, trembling and white with rage. "Then you have *lied* to me. I shall proclaim you," she threatened.

"No," replied DeMonte, coolly biting his lip and looking her keenly in the face. "You would only implicate yourself. Take my ad-

vice. Nurse your wrath tenderly, little girl, if you will, but keep a still tongue."

"Enough," bitterly cried Adele, pointing to the door. "Go from my presence. I sincerely regret that I ever left myself for an instant in your power. I am sufficiently punished. Go, you ingrate, I hope never to set eyes on you again," she said, turning away, her eyes brimming with pent-up tears.

"Come, Adele," requested he. "Shake hands. Must we part in anger? Bid me good-bye," he said, as she still remained turned from his gaze, wrapped up in her silent, stony attitude of contempt.

"Sullen, eh?" commented he, apparently somewhat disturbed. After a moment's pause he said: "Allow me to inform you that the outer gate is locked and the bloodhounds are loose. Probably it would be unsafe for me to pass out of the grounds this late—alone."

"Go," said she, turning and facing him. "I'll show you more mercy than you deserve. I have command over the brutes. Lead on, coward," she hissed, as she followed him through the open door.

"Scoundrel," ejaculated Leigh, parting the curtains, immediately after DeMonte and Adele had left the room. "Some one ap-

proaches," he exclaimed, as Lucette softly made her appearance.

"Still up, Leigh?" inquired Lucette, in a surprised tone of voice. She was attired in a loose evening robe, her luxuriant curls fell carelessly down her back. "I found it impossible to sleep," said she, in an apologizing tone (as Leigh looked surprised at her), and wanted something to read. I believe I left my book here. Yes, here it is," she said, picking up the book from off the table. She turned and was about to retrace her steps, when Leigh intercepted her. Cautiously looking about, he said:

"I have some important news. Sh," he continued, cautioning her to silence. "Some one approaches. No matter what I say, coincide with me and let nothing surprise you." With this warning to Lucette, he crossed over to the windows and made a pretense of locking them for the night.

"Lucette!" exclaimed Adele, breathless with surprise on entering the room, and perceiving it occupied. "Why, I thought everybody had retired," she anxiously looked first at Lucette and then at Leigh, perplexed, as if inviting an explanation.

"I came in to turn off the lights and secure

the windows for the night and found Miss Lucette at this untimely hour looking for a book to read. She seems to be very nervous and I have been trying to prevail upon her that she needs a change of air, as it would be beneficial to her, and would enable her to sleep well at night, instead of taxing her brain reading until the wee, wee hours of the morning."

"Lucette is very nervous and exceedingly restless," said Adele, recovering her composure.

"Miss Lucette," declared Leigh in an assumed masterly tone of voice. "I insist upon you to be ready in the course of a day or so to take a short trip to some mountain resort, where you can derive some benefit from the bracing air."

"A good idea, Leigh, she needs a change badly," affirmed Adele. "Jute may accompany you," suggested Leigh. "We'll find use for little 'Fuzzy' all right," said he, laughing.

"Yes, Lucette, you must certainly avail yourself of the opportunity. It will revive your spirits, and bring the bloom to your cheeks again. Good night, dear," she said, kissing Lucette lightly on the cheek. She then made her exit from the room.

"Tonight," said Leigh, in an undertone to Lucette, "I witnessed a secret meeting here between Roderick DeMonte and Adele Thorn, and I overheard a conversation which confirms my suspicion."

"What does all this mean," cried Lucette, agitated.

Do not question me so closely at present, Lucette. Help me to carry out my plan and you shall learn all," said he, casually stooping and picking up a small card which he held carelessly in his hand for a moment. Then, scrutinizing it keenly, he exclaimed in a hoarse choking voice: "Great heavens," then passed the card to Lucette, while beads of perspiration broke out upon his brow.

Lucette tremblingly took the card, and in a frightened voice read: "WILLIAM H. CHESTERFIELD, MT. INN, SUMMIT."

"That is my handwriting. The very card Mr. Fielding had in his pocket the morning he undertook that perilous journey."

"Well, well," cried Lucette, trembling and clutching the table, waiting in breathless expectation.

"Well, Roderick DeMonte evidently murdered Mr. Fielding."

Lucette, reeling, fell in a faint in Leigh's arms.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE EAGLE'S REST

The Autumn morning was radiantly beautiful. The air balmy and refreshing, the mountain scenery sublime. Nestling on the brow of the mountain was a little picturesque inn called the "Eagle's Rest." A sort of miners' resort, and situated about a mile and a half from the Lucette Mine. Seated on the veranda of this charming mountain inn, Harry Leigh was enjoying his pipe and at the same time scanning a newspaper. He was commonly dressed in the garb of a laborer. His clear-cut features were hidden beneath a broad brimmed hat which he wore, and the false beard further disguised his appearance. Suddenly the inn door was pushed ajar as Criss, the negro porter, with a broad grin on his face, came out.

Addressing Leigh, he said: "So, stranger, you lost da game?"

"Well, yes," replied Leigh, taking the pipe from his mouth.

"I'se nebber see'd dat lucky in'vidu'l beaten yet. He brushed da dust from many a poor debbil 'roun dese parts."

"How long has he been around here?" asked Leigh, quickly.

"Oh, he comes 'round 'casionally. He's int'rested in a mine 'long side ob dar Lucette Mine, whar da murder be commit'd some time 'go."

"Ah, yes, I remember reading an account of it."

Criss resumed, musingly: "Funny da son nebber turned up. Da groun' must hab swallowed him up. Berry sad 'fair. Dar am da bell, I must be off and tend to ma business," as the signal of a bell struck his ear.

"Just as I expected, DeMonte is here," soliloquized Leigh. "Yes; and a confirmed gambler. He does not suspect it was I who played a game of poker with him for the last half hour." Leigh arose as the rumbling of wheels fell upon his ear. The stage coach, on which I expect Lucette and Jute," mused he.

Criss quickly came from within at the sound of the approaching conveyance, and running down the steps of the inn, went to meet the lumbering vehicle. Opening the little narrow door of the stage coach, he assisted the two lone passengers to alight. Taking up their

valises, he led the way up the steps into the inn.

"Your disguises are good," whispered Leigh, as Lucette and Jute passed by him on the veranda. "I shall await you here, Lucette." Then he suddenly became engrossed in his newspaper just as Roderick DeMonte strolled from one of the mountain paths that led up to the inn. DeMonte seated himself upon a bench near by, lit a cigar, thoroughly satisfied with his thoughts, which were as follows: "Three days have I resided here. The mine murder is a thing of the past. I have engaged the men to work on my claim. Every thing settled I must hasten back to my darling Lucette. It seems an eternity since I parted from her. Congratulate yourself, DeMonte, you are a lucky dog. Even Esperanza is a thing of the past. Never have I laid my eyes upon her since the night we parted. The old hut is deserted and all trace of her is lost." DeMonte's train of thought was cut short by Larry Leigh, who, casting his paper aside, slowly descended the well-worn steps of the "Eagle's Rest" and sauntered casually in DeMonte's direction.

DeMonte, disturbed from his reverie, looked up, whereupon Leigh availed himself of the

opportunity to address him with these words: "Good day, sir; how soon do we commence work on the mine?"

"In a couple of days or so," answered he in a gruff voice. "If you need a little money I will advance it to you," asserted DeMonte, with an air of bravado.

"Thanks. Not at all, only—I would like to get busy," hesitatingly returned Leigh. Then leisurely sauntering toward the steps leading up to the inn, he sat down.

"Well," thought DeMonte, gazing after him, "it is a great pity that there is not more like you in the world."

At that moment Lucette, disguised as a Salvation Army lassie, appeared at the door of the inn, accompanied by Jute. Lucette standing there on the veranda in her dark blue dress of serge, her pretty face hid beneath a large poke bonnet, disguised with a gray wig and goggles, gave to the inn of the "Eagle's Rest" an air of quietude to which it was not usually accustomed. Jute, leaning on a crutch beside her, looked very ill at ease, dressed in a suit of white overalls and jumper. An old straw hat was well pulled down over her face

Lucette, suddenly recognizing DeMonte, ex-

claimed softly: "As I live, Jute, there stands DeMonte. Leigh has tracked him, sure."

"Oh, Missy, doan yo' betray yo' selb,' cried Jute, agitated.

"I say, 'Uncle Rube,' " said DeMonte, turning and surveying Jute, "Expect to do any business in these here parts? How many of your band are along with you?"

"Well," she replied, hesitatingly, "dey be tree ob us if yo'll jine," she said, displaying a tambourine which she brought out from beneath her blouse. "Will yo' jine us, sah," she inquired, shaking the tambourine in an endeavor to dispel her agitation.

"No thank you," said he sneeringly. "I am not very much inclined to be musical, I assure you."

"I say, boss," said Jute, anxious to change the subject. "Which am de trail to de canyon?"

"Straight ahead, then turn to your left," said he gruffly.

"Thanks, boss," she replied, overwilling to get out of his sight. She nimbly hobbled away.

"They want to convert us fellows up here," said Leigh, turning to DeMonte, as he whittled a stick to remove the nicotine from his pipe.

"I dare say we need it badly," replied DeMonte, walking away.

"Keep incognito and all will be well. I think I have my man sure," cautiously whispered Leigh to Lucette.

"Say, can you tella me, senior, where I canna fina da boss of Rattlesnake Mine?" inquired a chunky little dark complexioned Italian, dressed in blue overalls, a blue flannel shirt, high heeled calf skin boots and wearing a dinky little cap on the back of his dark curly head.

"He has reference to DeMonte," whispered Leigh to Lucette. Then addressing the Italian in question, Leigh answered:

"I am certain he was here but a moment ago."

"Dey tella me he wanta gooda man to worka. You worka for him?"

"Yes," replied Leigh.

"Alla righta; shaka handa comrada. I like toa bea your frienda. I seea you againa," returned Miner Joe, the little Italian, as he entered the "Eagle's Rest" in quest of DeMonte.

"Here comes Jute with Criss. Let us separate," said Leigh in an undertone, quickly to Lucette. Leigh seated himself in a chair on the veranda as Lucette hastily entered the "Eagle's Rest."

"Don see 'Lucky' nowhare. Gess dat fellah

Joe hab to wait his pleasure. Dat mine murder yo' be tellin' me 'bout. Did dey cotch de young fellah?" asked Jute, hobbling along.

"No, sah. He skipped sure as yo' born. Dem miners will be apt to see spooks walkin' off wid da gold some nite," said Criss, with a shake of his head.

"I'se heard so much 'bout dat mine murder I'se got great curios'ty to see it some time."

"I know da short cut ober da mountain. I'se got time," said he looking at his watch. Suppose we go fo' a walk if yo' say so. Would yo' frien' like to 'company us?"

"Certainly," replied Lucette, eagerly, as she stood at the door. I would be most happy to join you. Suppose we start at once.

"All rite. Come on, dis way folks," said Criss, taking the lead, Lucette and Jute following.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ASSAULT

The afternoon's sun was gradually sinking. A cool breeze wafted gently through the rugged mountain pass that led up to the Lucette Mine. The thud of a heavy walking stick kept time with the step of Roderick De-Monte, who walked briskly through the mountain pass. He suddenly paused, scanned his timepiece, then remarked to himself: "I have just time to take a trip over to the mine and back before dusk." Looking up he peered anxiously before him, exclaiming aloud in a surprised, inquiring tone of voice. "A woman, coming this way! Where does she hail from here in the heart of the mountain? Great heavens! Can it be she," he exclaimed. Great beads of perspiration starting out on his forehead, as he breathlessly cried: "You? You here?" As the figure of a woman approached slowly.

"Art thou surprised?" she answered him, startled. "Where else should the gypsy outcast roam?" "I thought that you had left these parts," remarked he. "The hut is deserted."

"Roderick," she cried, wringing her hands, "thou wouldst recall those bitter memories."

"Come, woman," he scowlingly said. "Have you not done with that nonsense yet?"

"No," she wildly cried. "To have loved thee once was forever. In spite of thy cruel hate I love thee still. Oh, Roderick, despise not my weakness. None will ever love thee as I. Take me," she imploringly cried, as she knelt on the road at his feet. "Take me to thy heart again," she pleadingly cried, "ere my gypsy blood be maddened with despair."

"Enough," he threateningly ejaculated, bending over her, then clinching his teeth and with a cruel look flashing from his eyes, said: "Your entreaties only make a brute of me. I spurn—I despise your love," he hissed. "Begone viper from my path." She arose suddenly, her eyes gleaming wildly, her long luxuriant tresses became disarranged and fell like a mantle o'er her shoulders as if to shield her from his cruel, threatening blow. Then boldly confronting him she gasped: "DEMON! Doth thou know that thou art in my power! That I possess thy secret!"

"You she-devil," he hissed, turning livid. "Take that, and raising his heavy cane he

struck her a cruel, stinging blow, which felled her to the ground.

Voices were suddenly wafted on the breeze.

DeMonte listened intently for a moment, then buttoning up his coat he hastily fled, leaving Esperanza lying unconscious on the ground.

"Come, folks," cried Criss, his head popping over a large boulder. "Gib me yo' hand 'n I'll help yo' over. Dat's right," said he, as Lucette and Jute endeavored to follow him: "All rite now, cried he," as he held out his hand and helped Lucette to descend the well-worn trail, Jute following slowly after.

"Hello! Who da debbil am dis?" Criss cried out in a surprised voice, as he discovered the prostrate form of Esperanza lying on the road. "A woman," said he, kneeling by her side and gazing at her anxiously. "And she 'pears clean dead."

"A woman?" repeated Lucette, kneeling at her side. "Quick! There must be life. Some water." Tearing off her straw bonnet quickly she gave it to Criss, who started off to secure some water from the nearby ravine.

Jute, taking out a flask from beneath her blouse, she offered it to Lucette, saying: "Gib her a moufful of dis, Missy."

"Who can she possibly be?" asked Lucette, inquiringly. Scanning her face intently and at the same time holding the bottle to her lips. "Probably she was faint from exhaustion and fell by the roadside."

"Look, Missy, she's a comin' to," exclaimed Jute, who suddenly dropped the bottle of brandy which Lucette had passed back to her, as she recognized the gypsy, Esperanza. Dropping suddenly upon her knees, rolling up her eyes and trembling violently with the nervous shock, she received upon meeting the gypsy woman again, she cried out in an alarmed voice: "Oh! She be de debbil of a gypsy dat dropped from de clouds. Oh, Lordy! Good Lordy!" she imploringly cried: "Sabe yo' frock in de wilderness dis day." Prayerfully clasping her hands, she rocked herself to and fro in her nervous excitement.

"Hush! Hush!" softly whispered Lucette. "You will betray us. She will not hurt you. She is powerless. Oh, this is terrible."

"How is she?" asked Criss, anxiously, as he appeared with Lucette's straw bonnet half filled with water: "Is she comin' to, nigger?" he asked, sprinkling Esperanza's face with some water.

"Mer—Mercy Roderick—Mercy," slowly

murmured Esperanza, as she regained consciousness.

"Yo' hear dat name, Missy?" said Jute, almost in hysterics, as she clutched Lucette by the arm.

"Silence!" commanded Lucette.

"'Pears dis young woman hab got some trouble on her mind," suggested Criss.

"Now, that she has almost regained her senses, perhaps she can tell us where she lives. "My good woman, are you better?" kindly asked Lucette, smoothing Esperanza's brow.

"Oh, my head—my head," murmured Esperanza feebly, opening her soulful gazelle-like eyes.

"How did yo' hurt yo'self," inquired Criss.

Looking around bewildered, she falteringly answered: "I was struck. I fell against a rock."

"Who struck you?" asked Lucette, amazed. "Tell me."

Esperanza endeavored to rise, her breath coming quickly, she excitedly panted: "A coward—Roderick DeMonte." And then, as if the exertion was too much, she leaned her head heavily against Lucette's arm and wearily closed her eyes.

Lucette and Jute exchanged a quick glance as Criss slowly shaking his head, remarked:

"Nebber heard dat name 'round dese yer diggin's."

"We must learn this woman's abode," whispered Lucette to Jute. "Come," she said, gently helping to raise Esperanza. "We will gladly assist you home."

Esperanza gazed in a startled manner at Lucette as if undecided whether to trust her or not. Then, making an attempt to stand up, with the assistance of Criss and Jute, she in a trembling voice said: "Thanks, lady, I'm ready." Raising her hand languidly, she indicated the direction the party were to take, saying, "Up yonder trail." Feebly tottering, they assisted her with difficulty up the rocky mountain pass.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TRACKED

Seated at a rustic table that stood on the ground in front of the "Eagle's Rest" sat Leigh and Miner Joe on the afternoon late of the same day of the preceding chapter. They were earnestly conversing and Miner Joe, busily engaged in refilling Leigh's glass from the bottle which stood upon the table, insisting that Leigh partake abundantly of the wine, saying: "Da besta drinka in da world. Wine giva man da strength of onea lion. Who is data fellar?" asked Joe of Leigh as he looked steadily at DeMonte, who at that moment came along and seated himself at a rustic table opposite, and was soon engaged in reading a newspaper.

"Why, don't you know him? That's the boss. 'Lucky' they call him around here."

"I've seena data fellar befora. I ama surea. He is a nota gooda one," said Joe, scrutinizing DeMonte.

Leigh, quickly pouring out a glass of wine, passed it to Joe, who mechanically took it, Leigh meanwhile thinking that it would in-

duce him to talk. "We are friends Joe," remarked Leigh. "Now tell me where have you seen that man (pointing to DeMonte) before? You may do me a great service by informing me."

"I owna a fishing boata down at Santa Cruz. One day I bea busy catcha da fisha. I seea two mana onea boata. Thata fellar upset da boata. Den da two mana fella in da water. He savea he's selfa," said Joe, nodding toward DeMonte. Then, continuing, "He leta da other mana go. Wella, I myselfa savea da other mana and tooka him to my housea on da beacha. I goa back to my fisha and da nexta da I finda thisa picture," said he, pulling out a miniature from his pocket and handing it to Leigh.

"Did you ever meet him again?" asked Leigh inquiringly.

"I lefta da Santa Cruz. I never seea him until thisa time."

"Would you know the man whose life you saved?" inquired Leigh of Joe, earnestly.

"I remembera hisa facea wella."

"You are a brave man Joe," said Leigh, grasping his hand across the table. "And you are my friend, Joe."

"Phew! I'se had 'venture 'nuff fo' one day," said Criss, addressing the crowd who happened

to be lounging in front of the "Eagle's Rest," as he passed by. He stopped a moment to arrange his tie and brush the dust from his boots with a large bandana, which he drew forth from his pocket.

"An adventure?" asked DeMonte, suddenly dropping the newspaper he had been reading. "What adventure was that, Criss?"

"We stumbled upon a woman lyin' senseless 'pon da mountain pass. It seems some one struck her."

"Some half-breed, no doubt," returned DeMonte, assuming an air of bravado. "What has become of her now?"

"Ask me an easy one 'Lucky,' replied Criss. "De Salvationists and myself offer'd to see da woman sably home. She took us as far as da cliffs, when she gib us da slip. We loss all track ob her," continued Criss, as he lightly ran up the steps of the "Eagle's Rest."

"It is Esperanza they encountered," thought DeMonte to himself, biting his lip with rage. "She must have taken refuge in one of the caves. She will not escape me again," he vowed under his breath. "I thought I had finished her this time."

"I say, boss," called out Leigh, turning to DeMonte. "You are acquainted pretty well

around this part of the country. Suppose we form a searching party and try to ferret her out."

"She may need assistance," quietly remarked Lucette, who was seated on a bench, resting after her long walk.

"My time is much too valuable, lady, to waste in scouring the country looking for a wild half-breed."

"Remember, she is a woman," said Lucette reproachfully.

"Yes, madam," returned DeMonte bowing, a sarcastic smile playing about the corners of his mouth. "And probably would require the services of her own sex. If she has taken refuge about the cliffs it would be almost a miracle to find her." Bowing, he walked away.

"Keep an eye on that fellow," whispered Leigh to Joe.

"Leavea thata toa me," answered Joe, as he leisurely sauntered off in the same direction DeMonte had taken.

Lucette, drawing near Leigh, excitedly whispered: "It was the gypsy woman we met. She must be connected with DeMonte in some way. It was he who struck her."

"Come then," excitedly cried Leigh. "We must form a searching party and away to the cliffs. The net coils around him. Quick to summon a posse to track him."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CAVE IN THE SIERRAS

The sky was one lucent glare from the rays of the setting sun, which cast its radiance in a glorious farewell as if kissing and caressing the cliffs in its good night embrace. The birds had long since gone to rest. The silent grandeur of the mountainous canyon was aweing. All nature seemed to be at rest, only to be awakened by a fleeting footstep which disturbed the sublime quietude in the form of Esperanza, the gypsy, who quickly ran breathlessly panting, toward the entrance of a secret cave which had been her abode since the night she had deserted her mountain hut.

Looking quickly around as if she were pursued by some unseen presence, and reassuring herself that she was undetected, she entered the cave, and with her heart violently throbbing, she sank down upon a rude pallet which was one of the few furnishings of the interior of the rocky structure.

"Home at last," she exclaimed. "Surely the strangers could not have tracked me, fleet as I am. Did'st I in my madness allow an un-

guarded word to escape my lips? If so—Oh, Roderick, thou hath brought thy doom upon thyself.” Sighing deeply, she arose, and, crossing over to one end of the cave, she drew aside a large dried skin which served as a portier to the adjoining apartment, or inner cave. Listening intently for a moment, and apparently satisfied, she returned to the pallet where she cast herself down, murmuring, “My tortured brain needs rest—rest. Sleep—blessed sleep—come, come to mine eyes,” she cried. “Oh, Nature’s sweet repose. Come, come to my aid.”

Her drowsy orbs needed only to be closed when the sweet sleep which her tortured brain and body required, lulled her to rest. As she lay asleep upon the rude pallet her beautiful face flushed with the excitement of the strenuous past hour, her luxuriant tresses escaping from their massive coils and falling carelessly upon the moss pillow, her beautiful molded arm thrown above her classic face, she formed a picture for an artist’s dream. Her perfectly formed bosom rose and fell with a regular motion as Nature’s deep, sweet sleep stamped its refreshing balm on Esperanza’s form.

Suddenly a hand stealthily parted the curtain at the entrance to the cave, revealing the dark

sinister face of Roderick DeMonte, as he cautiously peered within and then ventured toward the sleeping gypsy, Esperanza. Gazing around, he listened attentively and was so intently occupied in his efforts not to arouse the fair sleeper that he failed to perceive the form of a burly stranger who entered the cave immediately after him, concealing himself behind a projecting rock which kind nature had placed within the cave.

"Ah," hissed DeMonte, as a lurid glare spread o'er his countenance. "So," soliloquized he. "I have found your abode at last. Now, I intend to exterminate you from my path forever. No one evidently knows of this secret haunt. *You*," he hissed, a glitter in his *snake-like* eyes, as he bent over her and scanned her placid features. "*You* know my secret, but it shall die with you. Sleep, woman, sleep the eternal sleep with that smile on your face." And raising his hand, "This knife——"

"Hold! Villian," excitedly cried the burly individual, who, unperceived by DeMonte, rushed from behind the shielding rock and dashed the knife from DeMonte's hand, just as he was about to thrust it into Esperanza's heart.

The tumult awakened the gypsy, who sud-

denly arose and in a dazed manner confronted the two men.

"Who are you?" exclaimed DeMonte, with baffled rage, and turning deathly pale as he was taken by surprise. Advancing a step to recover the knife, he again cried out: "Fiend, who are you?"

"Larry Leigh," pronounced the burly individual, as he instantly removed his false beard and defiantly faced him.

"I'll have your life," excitedly retorted DeMonte, the cold perspiration breaking out all over him, and making a lunge at Leigh, he stooped quickly and recovered the knife. With uplifted arm he was on the verge of inflicting on Leigh a severe blow, when Lieutenant Fielding suddenly appeared at the entrance of the adjoining apartment within the cave. His left arm was still in a sling, and with his right hand he leveled a pistol at DeMonte, coolly exclaiming: "Move another inch and I will send a bullet through your heart."

"Ah! the escaped assassin," cried DeMonte, livid with fear, as he immediately recognized and pointed to the long-sought-for lieutenant.

The commotion instantly brought Lucette and Jute, who had accompanied Leigh to the cave, upon the scene, as the gypsy woman de-

fiantly exclaimed, her eyes riveted on DeMonte wildly: "Thou art the assassin, I, the witness," she asserted, her eyes flashing, her cheeks burning with overwrought excitement.

"Saved! Bertie saved," joyfully cried Lucette, rushing to the lieutenant's side and throwing her arms wildly about his neck. Casting her bonnet and gray wig aside, her lovely golden head of massive curls nestled on the lieutenant's bosom.

"Lucette! You?" cried the lieutenant, returning her embrace affectionately in the excitement of the moment.

DeMonte, staggering, turned livid with suppressed rage as he beheld Lucette in the lieutenant's embrace.

"God bress yo', Massa Bert. I'se Jute," said she, uncovering her frowsy head. "'Scuse ma costum'" agitatedly cried she, trembling visibly with the excitement she was compelled to undergo.

"Now to escape," thought DeMonte. Quickly seizing the opportunity caused by the reunion of the lovers, he made a bold dash for liberty through the entrance to the cave and was lost to sight before the startled party were aware of his escape.

The entire occupants of the cave instantly

started in pursuit, led by Leigh. He had hardly reached the entrance to the cave when they were astonished to behold De Monte being backed in to the interior of the cave cowering. Held at bay by Miner Joe, who had him covered with two revolvers. The Sheriff and the posse closely following.

"I keepa two eyes on dis fellah, and I keepa one handa, too."

"What's the trouble here," demanded the sheriff in a gruff voice.

"Well, Sheriff," spoke up Leigh, "That man," indicating DeMonte, "has made an attempt to assassinate this woman," said he, pointing to Esperanza.

"He is nota da firsta person hea trya to kill," said Miner Joe, looking at DeMonte as he shook his head knowingly.

"Secure him, men," commanded Sheriff Hunt, whereupon the posse surrounded DeMonte.

"Gran Dio," exclaimed Joe, recognizing the lieutenant. Turning to Leigh he whispered: "Thata isa the mana whose lifea I sava."

"Excuse me—one moment, Sheriff," said Leigh, crossing to the side of the lieutenant. Producing a miniature, he asked: "Do you recognize this, Lieutenant?"

Lieutenant Fielding, examining the miniature, answered in a low voice, "My mother's face."

"Then it was you," asserted Leigh, turning to Joe. "And not that scoundrel," indicating DeMonte, "who rescued you, Lieutenant, from a watery grave," saying this, he looked at DeMonte in utter contempt.

"This man is dangerous," said the sheriff impatiently, "as he has made an attempt to take this woman's life——"

"And mine also," interrupted Lieutenant Fielding, stepping boldly forward. "And," resumed he, "but for the kindness of this gypsy woman I would never have survived the murderous assault which that villain, DeMonte, inflicted upon me."

"I suppose you recognize this also," said Leigh to Lieutenant Fielding, handing him a small white card.

"Yes," answered Lieutenant Fielding, slowly perusing it. "The address you wrote for father the night before he left home," said the lieutenant, looking up inquiringly.

"Then, Sheriff," said Leigh, "I furthermore accuse Roderick DeMonte of being the murderer of Mr. Fielding."

"Great God," cried Lieutenant Fielding, a

cold clammy perspiration oozing from his forehead. "My father murdered?" he gasped, sinking down on a stump of a tree which served as a seat in the rude apartment. "Oh, this cruel, cruel blow," cried he, "staggers me," as he clutched his head with his unharmed hand.

"Bertie, dear," caressingly said Lucette, kneeling beside him and endeavoring gently to soothe him. "And you, you Bertie, have been accused of the crime. But I, for one moment, never doubted your innocence," she tearfully cried.

"Woman?" questioned the lieutenant, rising and looking searchingly into Esperanza's face, "Why have you concealed this from me?"

Bowing her head, she answered in a cold, still voice. "Thou wert ill unto death."

"My father murdered," repeated Lieutenant Fielding, dazed with despair. "Dead! Dead!" continued he in a bewildered voice. Then suddenly glaring at DeMonte, he rushed threateningly toward him, crying out: "And by you—fiend." Lucette tearfully rushed between them and cried, "Withhold, Bertie, for my sake. Don't sully your hands on that wretch."

"Come boys, make haste. Make ready the noose," commanded the sheriff.

"So it is *you* who has betrayed me," hissed DeMonte to Esperanza, his eyes wildly glaring from their sockets.

"Thou hast earned thy doom," she said sullenly, clutching her hands nervously.

"Baffled! Defeated! Overcome!" cried DeMonte, surveying the crowd in his wild despair.

"Confess you are guilty of these crimes," commanded Sheriff Hunt, looking sternly at DeMonte.

"Guilty? What can I say in my defense? Hunted! Defeated! Overcome! With an infuriated mob seeking my life's blood. You shall have it. Then let no one say that Roderick DeMonte died a coward. Away with the noose and I'll stand target for your vengeance."

"For my sake grant his last request," piteously implored Esperanza, kneeling at the feet of Sheriff Hunt.

"'Tis well," replied the sheriff, bluntly. "We'll grant that request."

"Thanks, release me," said DeMonte, with a sigh, the color receding from his face, leaving it as ghastly as a chiseled marble statue. "Allow my arms to be free. There is no earthly escape for me now. I'm doomed," cried he hoarsely, bearing his breast. "Now fire."

"Steady, aim, fire," commanded the sheriff.

Before the last command escaped the sheriff's lip, Esperanza deftly threw herself in front of DeMonte. With outstretched arms she received the bullet that was intended for DeMonte.

A murmur of horror ran through the assembled group as Esperanza fell mortally wounded. With great difficulty she managed to drag herself close to DeMonte. Gasping: "My death wound. I'm dying. My life for thine. Say," she said gasping, "at last you—love—me."

"I hate you," he bitterly said, bending over her, and dying you still have my farewell curse. You betrayed me. My death be on your head."

"So be it," gasped she, and in her last dying agony she made one strenuous effort. Dragging herself on her knees and grasping her stiletto from her belt, with a death-grip she plunged it quickly into his heart. Then fell lifeless at his feet.

"Ah," gasped he, receiving the fatal thrust, he fell dead over her lifeless body.

As the group gathered around, awed by this unexpected tragedy, Lieutenant Fielding

broke the solemn silence, saying: "Let us hasten away from this accursed spot."

"Where the gypsy's prophecy has been fulfilled," tremblingly cried Lucette.

"And an outraged love has been avenged," solemnly asserted Larry Leigh.

THE END.

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